

# FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

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## THE SHAPE OF WARS TO COME



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# STOP THE SLAUGHTER



# The shape of wars to come

## Stop the slaughter

Coming events cast their shadows before them. In NATO's blitzkrieg of Yugoslavia we see the shape of wars to come. For those who wonder where the war is heading, look to Russia, look to China, look to the re-emergence of German military power, that is where the war is heading. Behind the 'live ammo game' lighting up TV, beneath the saccharine spilling from the mouths of Clinton and Blair, is the fight for world supremacy. Those in Britain who watch these deeds, committed in our name, imagining they will have no consequence for us should know - the march to war has only just begun.

The bombing began on 24 March. Four hundred aircraft were assembled. Eighty fighter-bombers from the USA, Britain, France, Canada, Spain, Italy and Germany joined the first run. One hundred cruise missiles were fired. Aircraft from Belgium, Norway, Portugal, Denmark and Turkey stood by. NATO Supreme Commander Wesley Clark said his forces would 'attack, disrupt, degrade, devastate and ultimately destroy Yugoslavia's forces.' The *Financial Times* described the onslaught as, 'an action dictated by the luxury of Cruise missiles, against which few modern states can retaliate or defend themselves.' It was the 96th separate overseas military intervention by British forces since 1945.

NATO twice threatened Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) with missile attacks last year if Yugoslavia did not reach a deal on the predominantly Albanian province of Kosovo. In February 1999 the Contact Group of Britain, USA, France, Germany, Italy and Russia proposed that Yugoslavia give greater autonomy to Kosovo and accept 28,000 NATO troops being stationed there. Kosovo would turn into a NATO protectorate. Yugoslavia would reduce its 11,000 strong force in Kosovo to 1,500 border guards. In mid-March the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) accepted the proposal, but Yugoslavia did not. Five days later NATO attacked.

Army barracks, military airports, radar installations and weapons factories were stated targets; oil installations, chemical and pharmaceutical plants were also hit. After three days' bombardment, estimates of civilian casualties ranged from 50 to 'dozens and dozens' dead. NATO, effectively US, predominance, was secured with 'fire and forget' target seeking missiles, stealth technology for aerial dominance, satellite battlefield surveillance and computerised logistics, combined with massive superiority in numbers.

As news of the attack reached him, Russian Prime Minister Primakov ordered his plane, bound for Washington, back to Moscow. President Yeltsin condemned the move to war without consideration by the UN Security Council, where Russia could have vetoed it, as 'naked aggression'. He said Russia had the right to take 'adequate measures, including military ones, to defend itself and the overall security of Europe.' Russia's foreign minister

accused the USA of forming and arming the KLA. India and China condemned the NATO attack.

Yugoslavia accused Macedonia of allowing its territory to be used for firing missiles and warned Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and Hungary not to take part in NATO actions. Hungary offered bases to NATO. NATO promised to defend countries threatened by Yugoslavia.

### Testing theatre

This was a war of firsts: a great testing theatre for battle. For the first time since Hermann Goering, the Luftwaffe took to the skies in combat. HMS Splendid was the first British submarine to fire cruise missiles. New US satellite guidance systems for missiles were used and laser-guided bombs were tried out. The B2 stealth bomber made its debut, at

Kosovans are a useful foil, a disposable excuse when their purpose is finished. What of the Kurds, ten times as many as the Kosovans, butchered in far greater numbers by the Turkish state, year after year, with the weapons and blessings of Clinton and Blair? What of the Afro-Americans and the Latinos in US cities, under siege from armed police, the black people and immigrants in Britain, France and Germany framed, gaoled, fire-bombed, threatened not protected by the law? What of their humanity and their rights? Will their cause be upheld by an armada costing billions of pounds and launched with such pious devotion to good works? No.

Milosevic and Serbian nationalism certainly carry blame for the tragedy of Yugoslavia. Milosevic played on Serbian chauvinism to

tered bits of new-born babies on top of the adjoining trees, decorating fences and streets, people's balconies. The hatred... of Churchill persists today among the elderly population of Belgrade.' The US Air Force bombed Belgrade the following year as the Allies moved forward, positioning themselves ready to counter the Soviet Union's influence.

Today's bombardment is a continuation of the Second World War. As we said in FRFI August/September 1995, 'A strong Serbia would prevent the new unified and still power-hungry Germany from becoming the dominant power in the region.' The 24 March attack came a fortnight after Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic joined NATO. Both the USA and Germany favour extending NATO eastwards; Russia is opposed. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the USA has taken the opportunity of an enfeebled Russia to push its influence into the former Soviet republics. For now, the direction of US and German ambitions coincide. Further, European military power is not yet sufficient to project into the Balkans without US help.

Russia seeks to preserve its former domain within the old Soviet countries, from the Baltic to the Caucasus and the Caspian Basin energy reserves and Central Asia. Russia views Serbia as an outpost, a barrier to further encroachment on its former domain. Russia provides Yugoslavia with cheap fuel and, while it formally abides by the UN arms sanctions, it also provides weapons.

US strategists are thinking 15 years ahead as they struggle to dominate the world. World domination requires alliances and divisions among contenders and opponents. The USA is happy to see Europe and Japan take a greater share of the costs of the military burden for as long as they are subordinate. Japan is to be aligned with the USA against China, and Europe against a revived Russia.

The US share of world military spending is now greater than it was in 1985, the peak of the Cold War arms race spending. As arms technology advances, the destructiveness per dollar increases. US military spending is greater than the combined spending of the six other countries with the biggest military budgets in the world: Russia, Japan, China, Germany, France and Britain. With Russia weakened it relies more on nuclear weapons to defend its positions. In response to the attack on Yugoslavia, Russia has threatened to re-deploy nuclear missiles in Belarus and Ukraine.

While the massive onslaught on Yugoslavia was underway, US and British war planes continued to bomb Iraq; fighting on two fronts at once.

Blair's hogwash about defending minority Albanians tries to conceal a violent imperialist Britain that is determined to defend its global position by allying with the US war machine. British troops are getting busier and busier under Labour as we warned they would before the last election.

remove autonomy from Kosovo in 1989-90 and to bolster his claim to power. Kosovan Albanians began organising in Germany and Switzerland. The German ruling class's regional ambitions did most to dismember former Yugoslavia, when Germany recognised Slovenia and Croatia as independent states. Britain and France traded their doubts about this for opt-outs from the 1991 European Union Maastricht Treaty.

In the fighting that ensued a quarter of a million people were killed in bouts of 'ethnic cleansing' between 1991 and 1995. Serb lands were lost in Croatia and Bosnia as 100,000 Serbs were 'ethnically cleansed'. In 1995 this took place under cover of US jets.

Whatever its failings, socialist Yugoslavia under Tito ended the reactionary nationalist conflicts and provided four decades of peace. Capitalism destroyed that.

### Who is the enemy?

In FRFI October/November 1995 we said 'the history of conflicts which have made the Balkans a watchword for fratricidal slaughter is a history of vicious empires slugging it out over the corpses of the suffering people'. Belgrade was blitzed by the Luftwaffe in 1941. The RAF bombed it in 1943. A letter in *The Guardian*, 26 March recalls that event, bringing home the horrors of war: 'The direct hit on a maternity hospital... scat-



\$2.1 billion each. *The Economist*, 27 March, recorded another first, 'This is NATO's first unambiguous attack on a sovereign state that stands accused of being vile not to its neighbours but only to its own people.'

The justifications for all this are scandalous hypocrisy and lies. 'We are taking this action for one very simple reason: to damage Serbian forces sufficiently to prevent Milosevic from continuing to perpetrate his vile oppression against innocent Albanian civilians,' Tony Blair. 'We do it because we genuinely believe in the name of humanity and in the name of peace in this region, we have no alternative,' Tony Blair. 'We can't walk away from this tragedy,' 'It is important to remind people this is a humanitarian catastrophe,' 'We are a peaceful people but...' and plenty more where this came from, even from Blair's supposed critic and erstwhile left-winger Ken Livingstone.

Even the NATO Supreme Commander acknowledged that his forces could not protect Kosovan Albanians from the air and Blair was at pains to stress that no ground troops would be deployed. However, there are 8,000 British troops and 4,000 German and French soldiers in Macedonia, and US troops in Bosnia and Macedonia. Most calculations reckon 80-100,000 troops would be needed to occupy Kosovo.

## Ireland

# Peace crisis

BOB SHEPHERD

Rosemary Nelson, the prominent civil rights lawyer, was blown up in her car as she drove away from her home in Lurgan on Monday 15 March, at lunchtime. The previous evening and night, the area she lived in and nearby nationalist Kilwilkie estate had been saturated with British army and RUC foot patrols, with helicopters flying overhead. This military operation had only finished at 11am on the Monday morning. Between the end of this military operation and Rosemary Nelson driving off, approximately one and a half hours later, somebody had fitted a relatively sophisticated car bomb to her vehicle.

Rosemary Nelson was prominent in the defence of nationalists victimised by the RUC. She defended nationalist youth from the Kilwilkie estate facing daily harassment from the RUC. She was involved in the suing of the RUC over its role in the sectarian murder of Robert Hamill, kicked to death in the centre of Lurgan. And she worked for the nationalist residents of the Garvaghy Road, mounting more than 200 claims for compensation against the RUC. Because of her prominent role, Rosemary Nelson regularly received loyalist death threats and was constantly harassed by the RUC. Members of the RUC had threatened her and told several of her clients that she would be killed.

The facts point to collusion between the killers of Rosemary Nelson and the forces of British occupation.

The response of Loyalists in Portadown to her death was to march to the bottom of Garvaghy Road and taunt the nationalist community with the playing of lambeg drums. They then attempted to march up the Garvaghy Road attacking people and property. The so-called peace process is delivering nothing for the nationalist working-class. The activities of the loyalist terror gangs, the Red Hand Defenders and the Orange Volunteers, continue. In North Belfast in the Graymount area there is a concerted effort to drive Catholic families out of the district. Pipebombs and petrol attacks have been used in an attempt to intimidate Catholic families. The area did have a 40% Catholic population, today it is 10%, with most of them waiting for housing transfers. On 5 March, petrol was poured through the letter boxes of two houses and set alight. One of the homes had been attacked four times before. The night before, the home of a 33-year-old woman had been attacked with a pipebomb. Local taxi drivers and catholic businesses have all received death threats.

The Good Friday 'Peace Agreement' is at a moment of crisis. The 10 March deadline for the setting up of the 'Assembly Executive' came and went. Trimble and the Ulster Unionists repeated their demand for IRA decommissioning as a precondition to sitting in an executive with Sinn Fein ministers. The British government, repeating the same demand for



Rosemary Nelson

IRA decommissioning, announced a new deadline of 2 April for setting up the executive. This is one year to the day since the original signing of the 'Peace Agreement'.

The escalating loyalist violence and the continued impasse over setting up the executive point to the fact that the Peace Agreement is in danger of unravelling. Trimble knows that support for the Agreement amongst Unionist voters is falling. A recent poll shows that while 55% of Unionists supported the Agreement in last May's referendum, only 41% support it now. This fall in support is linked directly to the release of Republican political prisoners and the lack of any Republican decommissioning. This lack of support for the Agreement amongst Loyalists is reflected in the Assembly by Ian Paisley's 'No' block, which has the same number of members as Trimble's 'Yes' camp. This limits Trimble's room for manoeuvre.

It is, however, Sinn Fein which is under the most political pressure. The position they find themselves in is the culmination of their recent political strategy. Not to be allowed to enter the Assembly Executive as ministers would be a major political setback.

This political pressure was cranked up by Home Secretary Jack Straw when he attempted to stop the release of four IRA prisoners under the Good Friday Agreement. He went to the High Court in Belfast to argue that because the four were sentenced in English courts, they should not be released until the last possible date under the Agreement, which is July 2000. The legal argument for this was based on the different sentencing procedures used for people convicted of murder in England and the north of Ireland: Straw lost the case in the High Court, but he has six weeks in which to lodge an appeal. If he is successful, it will affect nearly 30 prisoners. Some already released would have to return to prison.

The pressure is intensifying on Sinn Fein and the Republican movement to begin the decommissioning process. After discussions in the USA at the St Patrick day events, Gerry Adams said he was prepared to 'stretch the Republican constituency again' but that 'I want to make sure that Mr Trimble and I jump together on this.'

Whatever the immediate outcome of this present crisis is, we can be sure that another crisis is around the corner as the Peace Agreement does not address the fundamental cause of conflict in the north of Ireland, its continued occupation by the forces of British imperialism. ■



# Labour's budget: neo-liberal dogma

Labour's budget was well signposted. It continued the themes, the public relations promotion, featured in the previous two budgets and the November 1998 spending review.<sup>1</sup> In New Labour speak this was a 'Budget for Britain', building on a 'strong foundation of economic stability' and 'efficient public services', encouraging a 'dynamic Britain of enterprise and fairness'. New Labour has finally left behind the 'century-long sterile conflicts' between left governments that 'undervalue enterprise and wealth creation', and right governments that are 'indifferent to public services and fairness'. The budget has hit upon that potent mix – the third way. The future, says Chancellor Brown, depends 'on enterprise and fairness together'.<sup>2</sup>

In reality it has been a fortunate set of economic circumstances that has allowed New Labour to promote the budget in this way. Labour raised taxes and squeezed public expenditure in its first two years in government, spending some £2bn less than the plans inherited from the Tories. Social services deteriorated and, 'as a result of our prudence', the current budget went into surplus for the first time for eight years. This squeeze on public spending will continue, but a period of lower unemployment in Britain has coincided with falling interest rates, following the recession engulfing some 40% of the world economy. As the British economy slows down over the next few years (the budget does not envisage a recession), tax receipts will fall by £8bn but are expected to be more than offset by a fall in public spending, down by £18bn largely as a result of a reduction in unemployment (fewer people on benefit) and smaller government debt interest payments. £6bn of this unexpected surplus will go into tax cuts of £4bn and increased public spending of £2bn. The rest will be used to pay off government debt despite deteriorating social services.

Fully committed to neo-liberal dogma this government, under the guise of 'fiscal prudence', is determined to cut back the state's role in the economy, and has actually planned for a current budget surplus of £34bn over the next five years. Net wealth of the public sector has fallen from around 70% of GDP in the late 1980s to 15% of GDP at the end of 1997, partly due to rising debt, and partly because privatisation and falling levels of public investment reduced the stock of government assets. New Labour has no intention of reversing this trend.

It is the tax cuts and spending increases which underlie the Budget's claim to bring 'enterprise and fairness together', to present a budget that, in New Labour hype, 'delivers tax cuts that reward work and make work pay for everyone in Britain'. Such exalted claims, however, fall apart once we move away from the soundbites that litter this budget and put them in the context of the real social and economic circumstances of present-day capitalist Britain.

## Who gains from the budget?

Labour's budget policies are driven by one real consideration. They have to ensure that the coalition of forces which put it in power remains intact as economic conditions deteriorate and unemployment grows. While serving the interests of banking and multinational capital, Labour has to keep the support of the professional, middle and upper working classes ('middle classes'). To sustain the major public services of con-

cern to the 'middle classes', in particular those of health and education, even at their present inadequate level, necessitates more resources and spending. Labour's taxation policies are crucial in this regard. The refusal to increase direct taxes on the 'middle classes' is at the heart of its dilemma. Public spending elsewhere has to be cut, hence Labour's attack on the social security budget, and any increase in taxation must be raised in other less direct and immediately obvious ways.

## Has taxation fallen?

According to the budget, purchasing power will be increased by around £6bn over the next three years: £1bn next year, £1.4bn in 2000-01 and £3.5bn in 2001-02, the likely election year. This, however, ignores the tax rises announced in Labour's first two budgets,<sup>3</sup> from a net £3.7bn next year to £7.7bn in 2001-02. Once these are taken into account, there will be an increase in net taxation (fiscal tightening) of £2.6bn next year, £3.6bn in 2000-01 and £4.1bn in 2001-02. Even the tax cuts of £4bn announced in this budget result from some dubious statistical manipulation. The government, against the advice of the Office for National Statistics, treated the £1.5bn increase in working families tax credit (unlike the benefits it replaced) as a tax cut rather than a spending increase, and ignored altogether the £2.75bn increase in taxes resulting from the abolition of mortgage tax relief, by treating it as a reduction in spending. In other words taxes actually increased as a result of this budget. The government has to resort to such subterfuge to hold fast to the neo-liberal ideological baggage inherited from the Tories (promoting enterprise requires tax cuts) and keep its 'middle class' coalition on board.

## The deserving and undeserving poor

Cutting the social security budget by forcing millions into low paid work is central to Labour's efforts to cut public spending. The New Deal is at the heart of this process. The problem is that capitalist enterprise, concerned only with making profits, cannot provide adequately paid jobs for increasing numbers of working class people. 14.1m people live in poverty, including 4.6m children, and nearly 20% of working age households have no working adult. 40% of 50-65 year olds are not working.<sup>4</sup> Labour sees such people as a drain on public spending – clearly the *undeserving poor*. It is determined to force such people off benefits into lousy jobs at poverty rates of pay and, through subsidies and tax concessions to employers, hopes that sufficient jobs can be provided. The minimum wage, the alignment of the starting rate of National Insurance

contributions with income tax, the working family and child tax credits, the subsidised jobs, the introduction of the New Deal for the over-50s, are all designed towards this end: in New Labour speak, 'to reward work and ensure working families are better off'. Labour's 'fairness' will only start to apply to those that work – the *deserving poor*.

Labour's 'fairness' even when extended to the deserving poor does not amount to much. In October 1999, every working family with children, with no other means of support, will be guaranteed £200 a week – barely a living income. Over-50s returning to full-time work will be guaranteed an income for their first year back at work, after a £60 a week subsidy to their employer, of £170 a week. The new children's tax credit, to be introduced in April 2001, will make the average family with children £200 a year better



The 'family-friendly' Chancellor talks to women's magazine editors

off – not much more than the price of one of Chancellor Brown's haircuts. All of the budget measures designed to help families with children will, at best, lift only about 700,000 children out of poverty, from the 4.6m presently there.

More than half of pensioners are in the bottom 40% of the income distribution. Their vote could be decisive in the Scottish and Welsh elections. 7 million pensioners will gain from the increased tax and winter allowances in the budget and the minimum income guarantee of £78 for a single pensioner, and £121 a week for a couple. This means-tested benefit will now rise with average earnings from April next year – the minimum Labour could do after two years in office. However, around 2.7m pensioners, who mainly rely on savings income, will not benefit from the new 10% tax band as it does not apply to income from savings.

Most of the gains for the poor are, therefore, marginal and barely begin to compensate for the dramatic redistribution of wealth from poor to rich that has occurred since April 1979. Not surprisingly, as a recent

study has shown, the real beneficiaries of Labour's New Deal are its administrators and contractors who cream off 30% of its funding (*Financial Times* 24 March 1999).

## Sustaining the 'middle classes'

It is becoming increasingly difficult to protect the 'middle classes' from the economic downturn hitting global capitalism, although New Labour tried its best. 80% of the overall net tax cut in the budget comes from the 1p reduction in the basic rate from April 2000. The chief beneficiaries come from the top third of income distribution. The new 10p rate of tax on the first £1,500 of taxable income is good hype but, after the abolition of the 20% band, is of little overall significance, benefiting only those who earn enough to pay income tax by a tiny £66 a year.

On the downside the threshold for National Insurance at the top end of the scale has been raised more than the rate of inflation, mortgage tax relief will be abolished next year, and the married couples allowance will be withdrawn. These measures hit 'lower middle class' incomes hardest. Higher income earners and the wealthy are left

company. Tax experts regard this scheme as 'extraordinarily generous'.

## Promoting enterprise

Productivity in the UK is lower than in other major capitalist economies. The productivity gap with the US is approaching 40%, and with France and Germany it is around 20%. Capitalist businesses are not investing sufficiently in the British economy. In each year since 1960, the UK has invested a lower share of GDP than any other country. Investment as a percentage of GDP fell from a low 18.9% between 1970-80, to 18.2% in 1980-88 to around 17% today. At the same time British overseas investment is at record highs. In 1993, following the last recession, Britain invested more abroad (direct and portfolio investment) than at home. Although investment and growth have picked up since then, investment overseas is still equivalent to 70% of investment in Britain, compared to 20% – 40% in the 1980s. The overall economic growth rate of the British economy has been falling each decade since the 1960s.

New Labour believes it can overcome this development by promoting enterprise. Down to essentials it amounts to little more than tax cuts to encourage businesses to invest in Britain. Corporation tax will be cut to 30%, the third cut since Labour came to power and 'the lowest rate in the history of British corporation tax... the lowest rate of any major industrialised country anywhere'. The small companies tax will be cut to 20% and there will be a new starting rate of tax of 10p on profits up to £10,000 to encourage 'men and women to start their own business and work their way up'.

These are the tried and failed methods of Tory neo-liberalism. Large capitalist corporations, the ones which really matter, pay little or no tax anyway. Rupert Murdoch's main UK holding company, NewsCorp Investments, has paid no net UK tax since 1988. Bound hand and foot to neo-liberal dogma, New Labour is tinkering at the edges. The 61 new measures contained in this budget might be good copy but will do nothing to change this reality.

Meanwhile, manufacturing industry is in recession, the British economy is stagnating and unemployment is starting to rise again. In January, Britain's trade gap reached a new all-time record high, due to the strength of the pound and the collapse in demand from countries hit by the global crisis. The UK balance of payments, having a small surplus in 1998, will very rapidly move into deficit. A further deepening of the global crisis will shatter all Labour's exalted budget plans.

David Yaffe

1 See 'Labour's First Budget: reinforcing unequal Britain' in FRFI 138 August/September 1997, and editorials 'Prudence for the poor' in FRFI 142 April/May 1998 and 'Working class made to pay' in FRFI 144 August/September 1998.

2 All quotes, unless stated otherwise, are from Brown's budget speech.

3 See above articles for details.

4 See 'Poverty and inequality in Blair's Britain', in FRFI 147 February/March 1999 for these and other statistics.

## Unions become richer as membership declines

DAVID YAFFE

British trade unions are increasingly being run like business organisations. In 1997 they recorded a 19.6% improvement in their income from investment and other business transactions, despite a fall in their membership for the 18th consecutive year. Their total investment income increased to £40.24m, an income from other non-membership sources to £107.21m. Income from their membership rose only 2.8% to £576.6m. In 1997, total union assets reached £935.15m, an increase of £52.71m on the previous year. Investment assets totalled £350.15m, rising from £321.76m in 1996.

Union membership fell 1.7% in 1997 to 7.8m. This compares with the peak of 13.2m members in 1979. 17 unions with membership of more than 100,000 account for 82% of workers in trade unions. Two thirds of these were in unions of 250,000 or more members.

If trade unions are run like businesses then it is not surprising that top union leaders are paid executive salaries. Rodney Bickerstaffe of Unison had a income of £83,969 in 1997. It is no surprise that this union has little time for those of its members fighting against poverty pay and has sold out the Tameside careworkers and the Hillingdon strikers. The leader of NCUW's trade union, Bill Morris, of the TGWU received £73,290. Clearly he is much too busy running his business union to fight for Nigel's reinstatement.

Not surprisingly, Ken Jackson of the AEEU, on £70,453 a year, contemptuously dismissed the poor as undeserving. Speaking this year to *The Sun* he said 'my members are furious being ripped off as taxpayers by scroungers and fiddlers. They are working a 40 hour week pay that tax and keeping idlers crooks on welfare and they are sick and tired of it. It is the single most important issue in the minds of ordinary workers who are fighting to hold on to the jobs in hard times.' Trade unions like these with lucrative business interests and leaders on executive salaries can never become fighting organisations of the working class.

## Some of Britain's highest-paid union leaders

|                     |              | 1997 Income (£) |
|---------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Paul Snowball       | Unifi        | 104,133         |
| Christine Hancock   | RCN          | 99,470          |
| David Hart          | Headteachers | 86,955          |
| Rodney Bickerstaffe | Unison       | 83,969          |
| Chris Darke         | Balpa        | 80,916          |
| Nigel de Gruchy     | NAS/UWT      | 79,610          |
| Ian Partridge       | Lloyds/TSB   | 78,591          |
| Doug MacAvoy        | NUT          | 78,558          |
| Tony Cooper         | EMA          | 77,307          |
| Roger Lyons         | MSF          | 73,411          |
| Bill Morris         | TGWU         | 73,290          |
| John Edmonds        | GMB          | 71,000          |
| Ken Jackson         | AEEU         | 70,453          |

Source: Certification Office

\*Pay plus benefits



# Labour government - failing education

SUSAN DAVIDSON

It is without any surprise at all that we have to report on the latest crop of educational failures from the harvest of New Labour's education plans.

## Failing: the literacy hour

One of the key consultants on the national literacy strategy, Ruth Miskin, has stated repeatedly that the literacy hour fails slow readers. She refuses to implement it in the primary school in east London where she is head and where English is a second language for 95% of children. The lowest achievers must be taught the essentials of reading quickly to become fluent readers, in her opinion. The real point is that the government expects teachers to be automata who implement one set of strategies. The rigid structure of the literacy hour does not necessarily reflect the needs of children at all.

## Failing: sport for all

Although it was John Major who launched it, New Labour took 'Sport for All' on board, along with much else that was Tory. In the last two years 20% of secondary and 40% of primary schools have seen their PE provision decrease significantly. 30% of schools pay to use public swimming pools and over 50% rely on parents to fund lessons and transport. Not a single state primary school in a town or a city has received a penny under the National Lottery School Community Sports Initiative, says a National Association of Head Teachers report. They add, with imperialist disdain, that facilities for many primary schools are little better 'than a banana republic'.



## Failing: targets

Meantime we hope that the infants will not be taking life too easy. According to a headline in the *Times Educational Supplement*, 'Infants are not on track for targets' and 'seven-year-olds will have to work very hard to reach government standards for 2002'. It is estimated that only 53% of ten-year-olds will achieve the standard in maths by 2000 and only 63% in English. These figures do not in themselves give any indication of the rapid polarisation between middle class and working class children. Whatever the system that New Labour is promoting, it is not working for but only against working class children. The current harsh, competitive structures of 'learning' suit only those who can finance all the necessary back-up themselves. School is offering less and less to children in need.

## Failing: anti-racist education

Following the publication of the Macpherson report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) leapt into action. Picking up on 'institutional racism', it summoned

Education Authority heads and gave them a stiff talking-to. How unfortunate, then, that the DfEE's own magazine for its staff featured a 'golliwog', that well-known racist caricature, in a photograph of a Christmas pantomime (its own, not a school's). An apology was made but the incident highlights the basic ignorance and racism of those who issue the orders.

Education is, indeed, an indicator of just how racist Britain is. The statistics show that black children are about four times more likely to be excluded as white children and that 23% of children from ethnic minorities leave school with no qualifications compared to 19% of whites. All these figures are pushed to further extremes when very poor areas are accounted for.

## It will fail: performance-related pay (pay by results)

'A teacher's success cannot be measured by pupil's test successes or exam results.' Comments of this kind have been made by a range of individuals from Cardinal Basil Hume to parents in the playground in response to the Labour govern-

ment's plans for teachers' pay. The National Union of Teachers has given the DfEE until 31 March to withdraw its proposals which will be followed by a ballot on industrial action if it goes ahead. Readers of FRFI may be assured that the proposals have everything to do with saving money, dividing the workforce and disciplining the teachers. Let us have some decisive strike action against this latest educational stupidity.

## Failure of the old school system

At a time like this, when the Labour government seems to produce a weekly package of policy statements and a photo-opportunity, it is difficult not to be enraged. It is necessary, however, to be reminded every now and then just how appalling the British school system always has been for the working class.

The recently-published Moser Report reveals that there are an estimated seven million



adults in Britain today who are functionally illiterate. 6% are completely illiterate; a further 13% fall into the category of having very low literacy skills, such that they could not look up the name of a plumber in Yellow Pages. Nearly 20% of 19-year-olds who left school three years ago struggle to read. 'It is a shocking state of affairs in this rich country, and a sad reflection

on past decades of schooling and policy priorities over the years' says the author of the report, a former head of the Central Statistical Service. While agreeing with these views, other researchers believe that the number of illiterate adults is much higher. For numeracy, some claim that 30% of adults have low numeracy skills while others say it is as much as 50%.

A study of adult basic skills in 13 industrialised countries using standardised literacy and numeracy tests put Britain ahead of only Poland and Ireland (both with relatively large rural populations).

These figures come as no surprise to readers of FRFI. We have long regarded the British school system as elitist, serving the better-off well with academic qualifications of a narrow kind and neglecting the children of the poor. The demand for social justice and human dignity have rarely touched the schooling system in Britain. Generations of school-hating young people will be produced from the narrow, authoritarian system prescribed for them. The future will be no better than the past unless we fight for it.

## Blair's 'action plan' for middle class parents

Tory spending plans were not all that New Labour pledged to keep. They also continued to open up many sectors of schooling to private business: careers offices, examination boards, training and teacher supply agencies, for example. Further, by retaining Chris Woodhead as the chief inspector of schools it was clear that the targeting, testing and streaming approach to education would continue.

The consequences of these Tory/Labour policies has been the rapid polarisation of many comprehensive schools into successes and failures. A Catch-22 situation has developed where successful schools are better resourced than schools



Chris Woodhead

where children are most in need and increasingly lack what is required. Some inner city schools are becoming desperate institutions jostling for position at the bottom of the league tables in a hopeless struggle to compete.

Middle class parents are appalled that if their children are not lucky enough to get a place in the handful of selective schools, like Blair's own children, they have to attend the local comprehensive where they sit alongside the poor and suffer the same poor facilities.

Since the Labour Party is determined to retain the middle class vote while at the same time cutting state expenditure, it can only solve the problem by division and selection. An 'action plan' will divert resources to the 'most able' children in the inner cities. They will be granted an extra £350 million for the creation of what can only be called 'grammar schools'. The government is quite blatant about this. It is frankly offering a bribe to middle class parents in exchange for their vote.

These new 'centres of excellence' or 'Beacon Schools' will exist alongside the poor schools where the majority of working class children will be schooled in the bottom tier of the state system. As always, there is no intention to resource the whole of the state education sector properly.

# Death in Lincoln: Another police cover-up?

JIM CRAVEN

Rosemary Fyfe, a careworker from Lincoln, was killed last September. Eyewitnesses say she was hit on the head by a policewoman wielding a lump of wood.

After six months of 'investigation' by Derbyshire police, the Crown Prosecution Service has decided not to press criminal charges against the Lincolnshire policewoman.

The police have tried to suggest that Mrs Fyfe died of a heart attack. They searched her house for medicines to back this up; they even claimed that a neighbour may have contributed to her death because of an argument they had had two months earlier!

In fact, early tests by a Home Office pathologist reportedly showed that injuries to Mrs Fyfe's face were consistent with being hit by a blunt object and that she was likely to have died from the effects of the blow.

According to Mrs Fyfe's family, an officer from the inquiry team told them that he knew how Mrs Fyfe died, but that it was more than his job was worth to let them know the truth. The family say they have been intimidated by the police

to drop the whole affair. During a routine visit to Mrs Fyfe's sister, the police searched her house for 'stolen' property. Witnesses have been threatened with charges of perjury if they don't change their statements. The police organised a meeting with the family to divert them from a re-enactment of the crime at which none of the key witnesses were present.

As Mrs Fyfe's family told FRFI: 'They are trying to brush it all under the carpet. They are making out that all the witnesses are liars. If this had happened to a police officer or someone had done over an MP, someone would have been arrested straightaway and locked up.'

This isn't just another case of police corruption, or the police protecting their own. It typifies the contempt of the police for working class people and black and Asian communities. Last September, as Mrs Fyfe lay dying, the police refused to give her medical help or to call an ambulance while they chased a youth they wanted to arrest. Seeing what was happening, the youth gave himself up. By the time the police condescended to call an ambulance, Rosemary Fyfe was dead.

# Gandalf trial: victory at last

STEVE BOOTH

In FRFI 144 (August/September 1998), I wrote about the November 1997 Gandalf gaolings (Green Anarchist and Animal Liberation Front); how Saxon Wood, Noel Molland and I were gaoled for 'conspiracy to incite criminal damage'. Our crime was to report eco-stuff and animal rights actions in GA, our radical newspaper.

During the trial, on 7 September 1997, the Alternative Media gathering in Oxford issued a statement against the prosecution (see *Corporate Watch* issue 5/6). After we were gaoled, news went round the internet. London Greenpeace pushed the campaign and Index on Censorship put extracts from GA, including the mega-inciteful 'Diary of Animal Liberation' on the net.

After Winchester and Preston gaols, I ended up in Lancaster Castle. The other cons were astonished when they found out what I was in for. 'What happened to freedom of speech?' they all asked. An unwritten constitution isn't worth the paper it isn't written on.

Every day, these wonderful

letters and letters came in, from all over Britain but also from Holland, Scandinavia, USA, Canada, South America, Australia and New Zealand. Word about the case got round, via the internet, so much so that when I got released, on 27 March 1998, I had four heavyweight prison bin bags of letters to lug out of the castle gate.

Our appeal was heard at the High Court on 21 July 1998, which was also a bizarre experience. The grounds were lack of clarity in the wording of the indictment. They charged us under Section 1(i) and 1(iii) of the Criminal Damage Act, but missed out the word 'arson'. So nobody really knew whether we had been convicted of conspiring to incite just criminal damage, or arson, or both. The appeal judges effectively said they thought we were guilty, but the legal wording of the charge was unsafe.

The second Gandalf trial, of Paul Rogers and ALF press officer Robin Webb, began on 2 November 1998 after several false starts. Even at the start, though, this second trial ran into trouble. The prosecution denied that we, the first defendants, had been 'acquitted'. The

defence proved we had been, by producing certificates from the High Court, forcing an adjournment for 'clarification'. The situation had deliberately been left ambiguous to avoid undermining this second trial.

At this stage, it looked like we would have to go to the House of Lords for further clarification of the clarification. However, when the second trial resumed, on 25 November, it was successfully argued that, as the first convictions were unsafe, and as Paul and Robin had been committed for trial under the same flawed indictment back in December 1996, their committal hearing was also invalid. This was the cruncher, bringing the second Gandalf trial to a halt.

Because they try to censor you, you become more aware of censorship as an issue. I have a folder of stuff going back years, from Zircon and Spycatcher in the 1980s through to the 21 February 1999 injunction by Jack Straw to prevent the leak of the Stephen Lawrence report. The state operatives never learn that suppression only draws attention to the thing being suppressed. Reports on GMOs, cover-ups of government inepti-

tude... The Gandalf case was different, in that it was a broad-band attack on the whole protest movement. Prior to the gaolings, the liberal media, *The Guardian*, Liberty and other chocolate teapots failed the Gandalf defendants. For all their puffing of article 19 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, when it came down to it, on their own doorstep, they were silent.

The radical movement, on the other hand, was bloody brilliant. Examples of censorship abound, but they proved that the best response is not silence but a refusal to be intimidated. We can and must support each other against state censorship, publish news the state wishes to suppress. They'll be back, but we're still here.

Because the radical movement has multiple paths to transmit information along and is truly international, we can never be silenced. More magazines! Better magazines! Better information! Keep strong and keep fighting for what you believe in.

GA can be contacted at BM1715, London WC1N 3XX



# Pinochet: Labour's crisis continues

ROBERT CLOUGH

Once again, the Law Lords have decided to dismiss General Pinochet's claim to immunity from prosecution as a former head of state. Once again, Labour faces a crisis: should it now let him return to Chile, or should it let the Spanish request for his extradition proceed? Either way, the government – more precisely, Jack Straw – is caught. If Straw uses his discretion as Home Secretary to let him go back to Chile, he will be doomed politically. As we wrote following the first Law Lords adjudication last November, such a decision 'would render his political position untenable – tough on anti-social behaviour, tough on child criminals, tough on asylum seekers, soft on mass torturers and murderers'. Yet the Law Lords have left Straw a loophole. In deciding by a majority of six to one that Pinochet could be extradited to Spain to face charges of torture, kidnapping and murder, they stipulated that this could only be for charges that relate to the

period after September 1988, when torture became an 'extra-territorial' crime under the Criminal Justice Act. In other words, the provisions of the Act could not be applied retrospectively, and in particular, could not be used to justify Pinochet's detention for crimes committed during and after the 1973 coup, when most of the murder and torture took place. The effect of this has been to reduce the number of extraditable charges the general faces from 30 to three. The chair of the Law Lords panel, Lord Browne-Wilkinson, tipped the wink to Straw: 'In view of the very substantial reduction in the number of extraditable charges, this matter will require to be reconsidered by the Secretary of State.'

Once again, the right wing is championing the cause of Pinochet in a very noisy and well-funded campaign. Lady Thatcher is of course an old ally. But virtually every newspaper demands that Pinochet be returned to Chile because of his support for British imperialism in the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas war. Hence they are trotting out photos of Straw the young stu-

dent politician in Chile in 1966, when he may or may not have spoken to Senator Salvador Allende, four years before Allende was elected president. The whole of the Tory party wants Pinochet sent back – it is a blow against Europe. Lord Lamont demands that 'the expensive and embarrassing farce be stopped'. Thatcher takes eilevenses with him, whilst William Hague insists he should be sent back to Chile. The Archbishop of Canterbury showed the Church of England's hand in November last year, asking Straw to show compassion to Pinochet, to be followed last month by the Pope. And so do some on the left as we reported in our last issue – Eric Hobsbawm for instance.

Like the Law Lords, Straw will make a decision that has nothing to do with justice, and everything to do with political calculation. The Law Lords could not reverse the decision that five of their number had made last November – that would have been too embarrassing. Questions would be asked: why should one set of Lords decide one thing, and a second

set something quite opposite? It would show conclusively that their rulings depend on nothing more than individual prejudice and political persuasion rather than a completely phony 'objective and impartial' interpretation of the law.

But Pinochet is one of their own, a willing tool of imperialism, a defender of the wealthy and powerful. So they devise a ruling which in theory upholds the principles that torture and mass murder are international

crimes, whilst giving Straw a heavy hint that in practice it does not apply to Pinochet. The cut-off date that they defined – late 1988 – was considered by the Appeals Court and the first Law Lords appeal. Both dismissed it as an empty legal point given the state of international law. Now it is being used as a basis to demand clemency from Straw. Somehow, three charges of torture, conspiracy to torture and murder have become acceptable, minor misdemeanours. In fact, Pinochet is a serial torturer and murderer. In response to the Law Lords, the investigating Spanish magistrate, Baltasar Garzon, has sent a further list citing 41 cases of detention and torture which took place after 1988. As it is, there are 1,200 unsolved disappearances which remain open



Torturer Pinochet

cases under international law and would therefore be valid grounds for extradition. However, for British imperialism, justice and morality are very poor cousins to high politics.

Hence it is now back to Jack Straw, fearless scourge of feckless mothers, unruly children, 'winos', 'squeegee merchants' and beggars, dole cheats, so-called psychopaths and asylum seekers. Tough on the poor – but with a track record of being far less tough on the rich and powerful. However, he has to consider his political career. Once again, it is a choice between offending Europe or offending the US, whose role in the 1973 coup would be exposed in any Spanish trial. It is also a matter of domestic credibility. Of one thing we can be certain: however 'objectively' he expresses his view, it is number one he will be looking after.



'One of us': Thatcher takes tea with Pinochet

## Zimbabwe – a right mess

DAVID KITSON

There is such a mess arising in national affairs here in Zimbabwe that it is becoming difficult to decide where to dip a delicate toe into it, remembering that the Harare sewage system is on the brink of collapse anyway. Let us start at the point of greatest uproar here. Its beginnings were in President Mugabe's despatch of armed forces to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to fight on the side of Kabila, against the invading armies of Uganda and Rwanda and the seekers for Tutisilisation (a word I would not coin myself). It is remarkable how these small countries, along with the evil forces of Unita, have seemingly endless military resources, some in the form of anti-personnel mines which they are now sowing in the Eastern Congo. Not all the players in a struggle which will shape Central Africa for years have come out into the open yet. I suppose the role of Western imperialism will one day be exposed.

A group of human rights organisations commissioned a poll on the local attitude towards intervention in the DRC. 70% of the sample were opposed, even though Zimbabwe is fighting on the side of the angels. The local independent press, which is proliferating, is opposed to the Mugabe government and to its actions in the DRC. *The Standard*, a conservative Sunday paper, in a front page headline, said that 23 senior army officers have been arrested for planning a coup. It is thought that some soldiers might have been arrested

for being mutinous, but there is no information on this, hardly even rumours.

*The Standard's* editor, Chavunduka, and its senior reporter, Choto, were arrested, interrogated and tortured by the military for ten days. The military has no jurisdiction over civilians but ignored repeated High Court orders that the two journalists be brought to court. The Secretary of Defence, Job Whabira, sneered that the military were not bound by the courts. Three Supreme Court judges petitioned Mugabe over their concern for respect for the rule of law. Mugabe gave an angry and contemptuous reply saying they should resign from the bench and enter politics if they wanted to give orders to the executive, insinuating that they were in league with foreign-backed whites intent on undermining Zimbabwe. Then 134 lawyers, about 80 of them black, signed a public statement in support of the judges. Whabira and the police commissioner had to appear before the High Court in application for costs for contempt of court brought by *The Standard*. Costs were awarded against the Ministry of Defence.

Chavunduku and Choto were then formally arrested and charged under the Law and Order Act, used by the Smith regime against liberation fighters. When this notorious Act was promulgated in 1960, the then Chief Justice resigned in protest. Now the Mugabe regime is using it. The two journalists were released on bail, and, after some dithering by the state, were allowed to go to the UK for medical and psychological treatment. A troop of doctors have confirmed they were tortured.



Peasants are still waiting for land

### Inflation

Last November the state expropriated 841 farms under the Land Acquisition Act although they haven't actually been handed over to the peasants yet. The expropriation is a sticking point for the IMF which is withholding a second tranche of financial aid amounting to US\$53m. It is complaining about the slow pace of privatisation, corruption in NOCZIM (National Oil Company of Zimbabwe) and is asking for clarification on the disposal of the government's holdings in the Wankie Colliery to Malaysian interests. The World Bank, the EU and other donors have also suspended fiscal support. This is being aggravated by the lapse of civil liberties here and Zimbabwe's involvement in the DRC. So the market took fright and the Zimdollar crashed by 57% overnight. By mid January the Zimdollar reached \$271.42 = £1. Prices rose by 20-22%. The Reserve Bank has managed to stabilise the dollar at around \$261 = £1, for the moment but

prices haven't come down.

On the contrary, coal and coke products have recently been hiked by 50%. Medical fees have gone up again, fees in state schools have doubled and trebled, while the Harare Council, whose finances are in a disastrous condition, is going to run without a budget for four months. Maize meal, a basic staple, suddenly disappeared from the shops everywhere only to return a few weeks later.

The whole Harare Municipal Council has been suspended and replaced by an appointed commission. Ratepayers, paying higher rates, are subject to electricity blackouts and interruptions of water supply; rubbish and sewage lie around. The enormous potholes in roads aggravated by the incessant rains are not being filled. A man fell into an open manhole and drowned. There is talk of a rates strike.

Meanwhile cholera stalks the land. Over 100 have died and over 1,000 are afflicted. The malaria season is upon us: hundreds have died while tens of thou-

sands suffer. 200 people a day die of AIDS. Full-blown AIDS sufferers are rising to 500,000 and there are 600,000 AIDS orphans. Perhaps 35% of the population is HIV-positive. The middle management stratum has just about been wiped out.

Corruption is endemic. The managers of NOCZIM are alleged to have ripped off \$24bn. They have been suspended but are still eligible for bonuses. A clerk in the NSSA, the equivalent of the NHS, has allegedly stolen \$23m, while the employers have fallen short of their remittances by \$1bn. They collect them but keep them: the City of Harare owes \$8m. The indigenous Solid Insurance Company is insolvent, unable to pay short term claims running into billions of dollars. So it goes.

### The people resist

Reacting to the mass stayaways organised so successfully by the ZCTU (Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions) and to the food riots caused by price rises of staples, Mugabe has invoked the Presidential Powers (Temporary Measures) Act to impose new banning regulations on *povo* actions in the interests of the economy. Only high ranking chefs (rich manipulators) may rip off the economy at will.

Strikes, however, have continued. The airtraffic controllers went on strike and were all sacked, à la Reagan. They were replaced by new recruits with three months' training instead of the usual four years, backed up by a few controllers recruited from Zambia. Now the strikers have all been reinstated. The PTC (Post and Telecommunications Corporation) telephone landline section went on strike because similar PTC cellphone technicians were being paid 200% more. They were out for more than a month. Now railway workers have struck over

allowances.

The ZCTU regards Mugabe's ban on strikes as a ploy to get all their leaders detained in the event of further strikes or rioting. The ZCTU has been engaged in a tripartite forum in discussions with the government and employers. A 20% rise in wages across the board was proposed and individual trade unions are currently negotiating this. But, deciding that the tripartite talks were just 'talk', the ZCTU has withdrawn. They have announced that they are backing the formation of a new political party oriented towards labour.

For some time the ZCTU has been participating in a National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) with NGOs, trade unions, churches, human rights and women's organisations, discussing reforms to the constitution: it is generally agreed that reforms are needed. The NCA organised a 1,000-strong march to the city centre last Sunday, but not a single newspaper mentioned it.

The next general election is due in 2000 so new parties are being formed and old ones are coming to life. Zanu itself is funded by the state to the tune of \$60m. When one Zanu MP said in parliament, some months ago, that Mugabe should go, he was deprived of his party positions for two years. Now that another has said that the country's leadership is old and tired, and there is a need for a 'new set of horses to pull the carriage of state forward', the Zanu politburo is divided and no action has been taken so far. Let's face it, Vice President Nkomo is 82 and Vice President Muzenda is 77. Mugabe had his 75th birthday last month. He has been buzzing around Africa trying to alleviate the problems of the continent like a busy bluebottle. Buzz, buzz.



# Racism in the labour market

NICKI JAMESON

A survey produced by the Government Statistical Service and published in the December 1998 issue of *Labour Market Trends* confirms once again the prevalence of racial discrimination in employment.

In 1997 there were 2.2 million people of working age in Great Britain who belonged to the groups classified under the 1991 Census as being of minority ethnic origin. (As pointed out in previous FRFI articles, these categories exclude white minorities, such as those people of Greek, Turkish, Kurdish, Cypriot and Irish origin.) They comprise 6.4% of the total working population and half of them live in London, although this varies between groups, with over half of black Africans and two-fifths of Bengalis living in inner London, compared with only one in 14 Pakistanis and one in ten Indians.

**Unemployment and racism**  
All minority ethnic groups have lower rates of employment and higher rates of unemployment than white people but there are wide variations between groups and between men and women. The highest unemployment rate is that of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, with one in four economically active people unemployed.

One of the most startling revelations in this report is the exceptionally high level of discrimination against black African men in recruitment and



employment. One in three has a qualification above A level, the highest rate of any group, but they are three times more likely to be unemployed than white men are. The report goes through a series of machinations in an attempt to explain this away, and in the process reveals some interesting facts, but ultimately is forced to give up:

'The fact that a high proportion of Pakistani/Bangladeshis have no qualifications is likely to contribute to their high unemployment rate. On the other hand, Black African males are well qualified... One of the reasons why certain ethnic minority groups tend to have higher unemployment rates is their concentration in urban areas such as inner London, where unemployment rates are generally much higher than the national average (for Whites the unemployment rate is nearly half as high again in inner London). However, even within

inner London the Black African rate was nearly three times that for Whites.'

Although racial prejudice in employment is most acute in the case of black African men, all minority ethnic groups suffer from it and unemployment rates for both men and women from ethnic minorities are twice those for white people with similar qualifications. So much for the level playing field.

**Race and class**  
The survey also confirms the overlapping effect of racial discrimination and social class. Nearly half of all Indian men in work were in the top two social classes (professional/managerial and technical). Two-fifths of white, Chinese and African men are in these categories, while only a quarter of black Caribbean and Pakistani/Bengali men are. All equivalent figures for women are lower, with the exception of black Caribbeans.

Using an analysis of class based on a person's last employment, the survey showed that 'the unemployment rates from ethnic minorities in the top four social classes were, on average, more than twice those for white people. The differential was relatively smaller for the partly skilled and among the unskilled there was little difference between the white and minority ethnic unemployment rates.'

**And the gap keeps widening**  
Successive surveys have highlighted the vulnerability of minority ethnic workers to twists and turns in the economic fortunes of British capitalism. They have been first to be laid off in times of recession and, being lower paid, first to be re-employed in times of boom. However, despite a general fall in official unemployment over the past five years, the ratio of minority ethnic to white unemployment has remained consistently higher throughout the 1990s than it was in the late 1980s. Then, black and minority ethnic workers were on average 1.7 times more likely to be unemployed. The ratio subsequently increased sharply and has remained above the point where workers from ethnic minorities are twice as likely to be unemployed. In Spring 1998 the ratio stood at 2.4.

**Little hope for the future**  
Despite the higher participation of all minority ethnic groups in education between the ages of 16 and 24, the employment prospects for people of that age are far bleaker than those for young white people. The unemployment rate for young people from minority ethnic groups was, on average, twice as high as that for whites and that of young Afro-Caribbeans three times as high.

# Europe: 'Je ne regrette rien'



Jacques Santer

ROBERT CLOUGH

**'I regret nothing': So announced Edith Cresson when an independent inquiry into fraud and corruption in the European Commission revealed that she had employed her personal dentist Rene Bertholet as a scientific advisor, and that the main destination of his 'study missions' was his home town of Chatellerault in France where he continued to practice. She also misled fellow Commissioners about known fraud in the £400m Leonardo youth training project for which she was responsible.**

The investigation was prompted by claims made last December by Paul van Buitenen, a Dutch accountant in the Commission. He was immediately suspended on half pay as the Commission bureaucrats desperately tried to defend their seats on the gravy train. The investigation showed that two Commissioners, German Monika Wulf-Mathies (a former trade union leader) and a Portuguese Commissioner, employed friends and relatives. It concluded that 'it is becoming difficult to find anyone who has the slightest sense of responsibility... Internal audit and control mechanisms failed to work... Contracts for services were often awarded under questionable circumstances'. Sounds just like a Labour council.

It has been a rich living for Commission officials. More sinister has been the Security Office which the Commission employs. This has been managed by retired Belgian police officers under the direction of a former police colonel. Belgian police of course have a long reputation both for incompetence and corruption, revealed in the course of their so-called 'investigations' into a murderous paedophile network. They also have a well-known taste for right-wing politics - one senior officer was known to have links to a neo-fascist organisation.

The Commission President, Jacques Santer was singled out by the report for his failure to take any interest or action over what it described as a 'state within a state'. The inquiry stated that Santer's answers to questions were 'evasive to an extent which can only be qualified as misleading.' This did not prevent Santer from claiming that it portrayed his performance as 'whiter than white', and stating that he could not accept 'this affirmation that the Commission has been responsible for fraud, irregularities and mismanagement.'

One of the contracts awarded under 'questionable circumstances' was to Group 4, which beat 12 companies in a tender to provide security at Commission offices in Brussels. In 1997 evidence was reported that Group 4 was allowed to change its bid after the deadline for submissions had passed. A Commission investigation found 'strong circumstantial evidence' to support the claim. Group 4 admitted 'inadvertently' overcharging, but claimed that this was because of the 'nasty and very right-wing Belgians' who run the Security Office. It could not deny putting ghost workers on its payroll, or refute an allegation that at one time almost a third of its jobs had been filled through cronyism. A Group 4 spokesperson said that they had



been 'told' to give favours to senior bureaucrats, like cancelling parking fines, but described this as a 'standard client-purchaser relationship.'

Group 4 is of course a favourite of the Home Office and Jack Straw. It runs - disastrously - the only gaol for young children, Medway; it also runs Campsfield, just outside Oxford, which holds asylum seekers and refugees. Last year, at a trial of nine detainees accused of riot, Group 4 employees were shown to be serial liars. The nine were acquitted. During the trial, Mike O'Brien, Home Office Minister, toured the prison and afterwards presented Group 4 with an 'Investors In People' award.

Following the publication of the report on 15 March, Cresson, Santer and the others desperately tried to hold on to their jobs. Commissioners are appointed by their member states, so there is no mechanism for sacking them individually. However, there was no way that the major European powers would tolerate such behaviour since it posed a major threat both to the newly-launched Euro and to the EU as a whole. Within a few hours, the entire 20-strong Commission had been forced to resign, opening up the way, it is said, for significant structural reform. The ex-Commissioners will all get substantial pay-offs on top of their fat salaries.

# Labour Council cuts in London

**Camden Council**  
Every Spring for at least the last ten years workers and users in Camden's community centres and other council-funded organisations cross their fingers and hope that they will survive the annual round of cuts. This year's victims are a Neighbourhood Advice Centre and a drop-in nursery in Camden Town and the Somers Town Youth Club.

Although Camden Town is a tourist attraction because of the market, the area is not rich. Somers Town is one of the most impoverished parts of the borough, where racial tension has run high in recent years. Also due to come under the axe, despite a widely supported outcry, are three public libraries.

Labour has been the majority party in Camden for many years but the New Labour cabal which is presiding over the current cuts has never been more confident and is busily working on a plan to rid itself of even the most insipid opposition from old Labourites. The new plan, backed by central government, is for a Cabinet and a locally elected mayor figure. The present bureaucratic committee system will be abolished and all power concentrated in the hands of these few 'modernisers'.

**Southwark council to cut workers' pay**

On 2 March, many services in Southwark ground to a halt as thousands of council workers went on strike, with 3,000 workers and their supporters congregating for a rally outside Southwark town hall. This was followed by a two-day strike the following week and a march.

The action followed the decision of the Labour-controlled council to issue 90-day termination notices to 5,000 employees if they refused a new pay package.

The new pay grading system - based on the US private sector pay scheme - would have meant many council workers would have had their pay frozen for up to seven years.

Many of these workers, such as nursery workers, refuse collectors and school caretakers, are already low-paid. The new system will also mean that workers can be sacked without the right of appeal.

The widespread anger at these proposals was further fuelled by news that council leader Niall Duffy was awarded a 140% pay rise last May, while Chief Executive Bob Coomber, who is also the Southwark Director of Finance, receives a salary nearing £100,000.

# Labour attacks democratic rights

ROBERT CLOUGH

Time and again we have exposed the oppressive and autocratic nature of Labour politics, epitomised in Jack Straw's rule as Home Secretary. Extensions to the provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the measures contained in the Asylum Bill, the refusal to repeal previous Tory legislation including the anti-trade union laws - all point to the fact that we will leave this century with fewer democratic rights than at any time in the past fifty years.

But this is not the end of it. From 1 April, anti-social behaviour orders come into force. The police can apply to a magistrate for one of these orders against anyone who they say is causing 'harassment, alarm or distress' to someone else, or who they believe is 'likely' to. If the defendant breaks the order over a two-year period, they can be gaoled for up to five years. The Home Office has admitted that 'in theory', it could be used against protesters. When anti-stalking laws were introduced, the Home Office insisted that they would never be used against protesters - three of the first five prosecutions under the legislation were.

New legislation against ter-



rorism is being prepared. The Home Office wants the definition of terrorism to be extended to include 'serious violence against persons or property, or the threat to use such violence... for political, religious or ideological ends'. The term 'serious violence' would include 'damage and serious disruption'. If this definition is adopted, any kind of direct action movement, even a trade union, could be deemed to be committing terrorist crimes.

Meanwhile, the Home Office has just established the National Public Order Intelligence Unit, which will gather intelligence on individuals and organisations, and work to prevent them undertaking any actions. Tory Home Secretary Michael Howard would have been quite unable to implement proposals such as these. For Labour they are mere commonplaces. Social fascism is returning.



# IMMIGRATION LAWS - institutionalised racism

**F**orget all the hand-wringing 'we are all to blame' act performed by Tony Blair and Jack Straw on the publication of the Lawrence Inquiry Report. Even as they squealed about rooting out institutionalised racism, parliament was giving the second reading to its latest manifestation. Britain's immigration laws are institutionalised racism. They set out a legal framework whereby a section of the population is branded as 'alien' and provide official permission for police and immigration officers, judges, adjudicators, employers, travel operators and now even marriage registrars to act in accordance with any racial prejudices they may harbour. And they are an open invitation to any other freelance racists out there to direct their violence against the 'intruders'.

## History

The first British immigration law was the 1905 Aliens Act, which was designed specifically to prevent the entry of impoverished East European Jews fleeing pogroms. It referred to them as 'undesirable immigrants', their definition of which was someone who 'cannot show that he has in his possession or is in a position to obtain the means of supporting himself'.

Following the Second World War, Britain deliberately invited immigration from the countries it had earlier colonised. Caribbean, African and Asian workers were encouraged to come to Britain to take low-paid jobs and, as 'Commonwealth citizens', were exempt from the immigration legislation then in force. However, there was an almost immediate demand for controls, which was backed by some trade unions and discussed by both Labour and Conservative governments throughout the 1950s, culminating in the introduction of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act. Trinidadian communist Claudia Jones, then editor of the *West Indian Gazette*, was among those who spoke out against the act, saying it reflected the government's fear of the 'unity of coloured and white workers'.

The 1962 Act was followed by a further Commonwealth Immigrants Act in 1968 and the Immigration Act of 1971. Since then, control after control has been introduced. By the 1980s the government had largely dealt with the immigration of black 'Commonwealth citizens' by a series of measures, including changing the status of their British passports to an inferior one which removed the right to settle here. It then turned its attention to refugees. The tightening of restrictions on asylum-seekers has been accompanied by a sustained media campaign of vilification. This sets up an entirely spurious division between 'genuine refugees' and 'economic migrants', as though attempting to improve your lot in life by fleeing a country whose economy has been enslaved and impoverished by imperialism and multinational capital, is somehow in itself a heinous crime.

## Fortress Britain

In the 1990s the British economy does not need to call on a 'reserve army of labour' from outside its borders, as the government is busy forcing the unemployed, disabled, single parents and young people into the worst paid jobs via the New Deal and Jobseeker's Allowance.

Labour fears, as the Tories did, that an expanding Europe and unstable situations in areas such as Kosovo will force it to provide for refugees. It is anxious to avoid the expenditure involved and mindful of

Croydon headquarters of the Immigration and Nationality Department

the gift it will hand to the racist, anti-European right if it is seen to be weak in this respect. The government is deliberately ensuring that its immigration laws remain harsher than those of its neighbours. Within Fortress Europe, Straw and Blair are ensuring the preservation of Fortress Britain.

## This year's Bill

The 1999 Asylum and Immigration Bill ensures that even those who, under the government's own narrow definition, will ultimately be recognised as 'genuine' refugees, will have to endure extreme hardship and degradation on the way to establishing their right to settle here. The National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns sums it up succinctly: 'The clear intention of this bill is that from the moment anyone arrives in the UK and asks for "Asylum" they will be punished. Not only they but anyone who advises them can also be punished.'

## The main measures of the Bill are as follows:

**Part I** includes the powers to give or refuse leave prior to arrival in the UK and to charge fees for applications; the abolition of deportation appeal rights in cases where conditions are breached or the person overstays - they will simply be 'removed'; the power to require financial security for granting of entry or extension of stay; the imposition of a duty on registrars to report possible 'sham' marriages to the Home Office; a new criminal offence of obtaining or seeking leave to enter or remain by 'means which include deception'. This criminalises virtually all asylum-seekers, as it is nigh on impossible to acquire the correct official documentation in order to legally leave a country in which you are being persecuted.

**Part II** extends 'carriers' liability, the system of fining any road-haulier, shipping firm, rail service or air-

line which brings illegal immigrants into the country, including those who do so unwittingly. Such a policy will ensure that transport personnel mark out anyone they think looks like an illegal entrant for searching and surveillance. The result of this will be, inevitably, that anyone who

**Part V** deals with immigration advisers. Advance publicity condemned 'unscrupulous' immigration advisers, who rip off desperate people. These do indeed exist, from the 'immigration pirates' who arrange entry in lorries for a large fee, to high-street firms offering quasi-legal advice and phoney guarantees of guidance through the red-tape. However, the government's concern is not to save refugees from being exploited but to make it harder for them to receive any form of assistance and to discourage lawyers and advice workers from taking on immigration cases.

If this vicious attitude wasn't obvious enough, the Home Office has made clear that any asylum-seeker challenging a decision by means of judicial review, will have all support cut off, stating: 'Appellants should look to their own community or the voluntary sector for support'. (*The Guardian* 18 February 1999)

**Part VI** deals with 'support for asylum-seekers' - or more to the point with removing virtually any remaining form of support. Labour is now blatantly admitting that it wants to make life as difficult as possible for immigrants; it aims 'to minimise the incentives to economic migration, particularly by minimising cash payments to asylum seekers'. As the Tories were hauled through the courts for removing benefits, Labour has thrown in a few riders about provision of non-cash benefit (ie food vouchers) for the 'destitute'. That apart, this entire section makes terrifying reading, as it is littered with amendments to social legislation as far back as the 1948 National Assistance Act, removing the right of 'a person subject to immigration control' to any state benefit, National Health care or help from Social Services. Following extensive lobbying by local councils, such meagre provision as there is will be centrally controlled by the Home Office and asylum-seekers will be dispersed around the country, with no choice in where they are sent.

**Part VII** massively extends the powers of immigration officers to arrest, detain, search and seize property and documents. Some parts of their powers are now greater than those of the police and they are even less accountable.

**Part VIII** deals with the operation and management of detention centres, in what appears to be a response to the revolt by and subsequent farcical trial of detainees at the Campfield House Immigration Detention Centre (see FRFI 144 for detailed account).

And **Part IX** amends the Marriage Act so that anyone at all marrying is expected to give 15 days notice, so that the Registrar's job of flushing out 'sham' marriages can be facilitated. Interestingly, the Explanatory Notes to the Bill state 'There is no evidence to suggest that religious marriages after ecclesiastic preliminaries are abused for immigration advantage and accordingly these proposals do not extend to the procedures for marriages celebrated in the Church of England and Church of Wales. However, they do apply to all other religious marriages solemnised after civil preliminaries'.

## Chaos

As we have frequently pointed out in FRFI on a whole range of issues, the Labour government has the confidence to go beyond the Conservatives' wildest and most repressive dreams. Jack Straw recently boasted: 'We are effecting more removals than previously and under this system we shall certainly get the number of removals to a much higher level than before' (quoted in ICAD Bulletin 13 March 1999).

This said, any such claims appear increasingly ridiculous in the light of the mounting chaos at the Immigration Directorate's Lunar House headquarters. The backlog of asylum applications stands at around 65,000, with the number processed per month having dropped from 3,000 to 800. A £70 million computer upgrade has made matters worse, not better, and up to 10,000 letters have not even been opened. Embarrassingly for the Home Office, not only destitute refugees are affected, and foreign businessmen have begun complaining about the difficulties of working in Britain.

## Penny-pinching

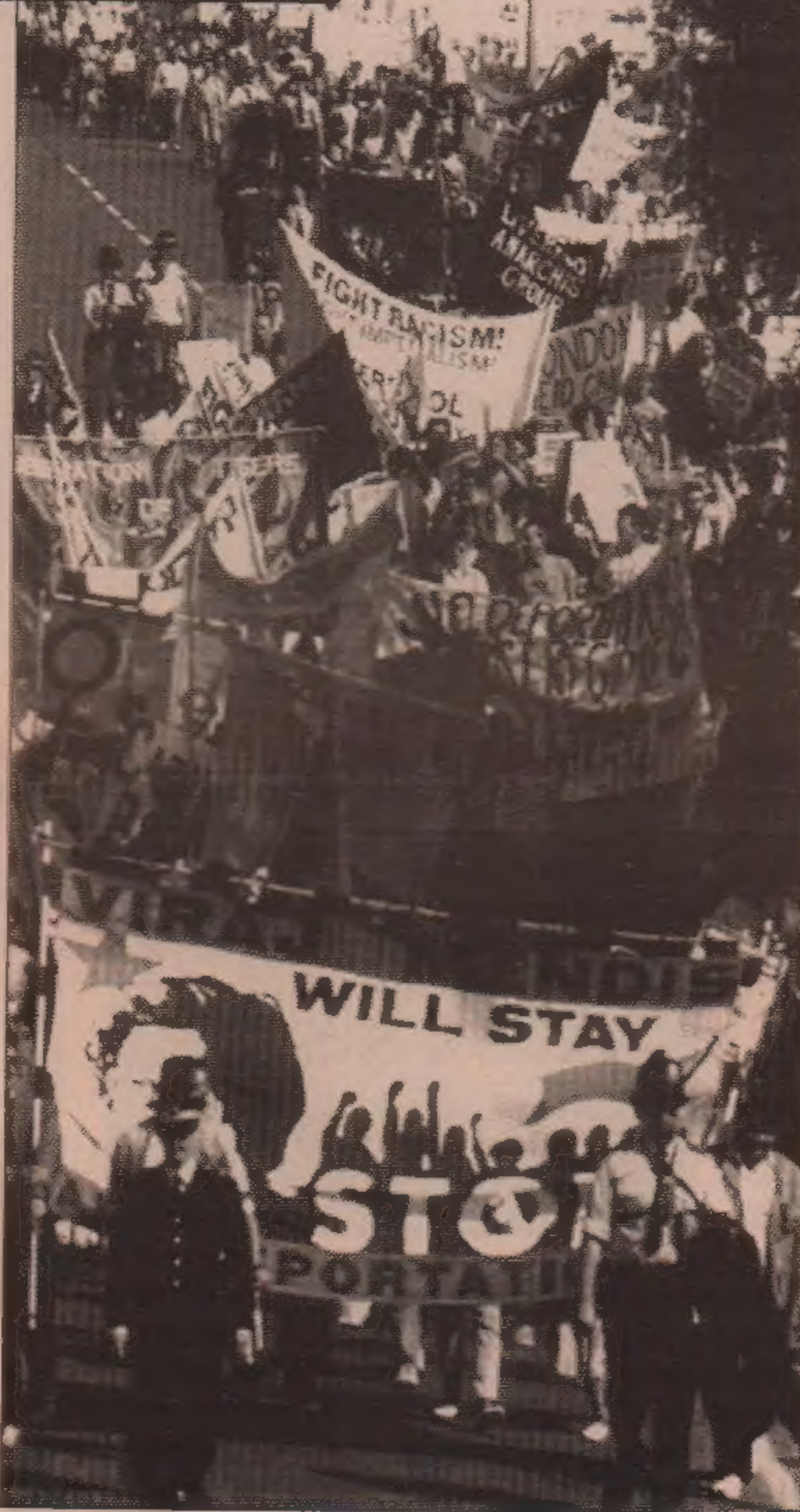
Jack Straw's other boast is that the Bill will save money. The Explanatory Notes emphasise this: 'On the basis that the new support scheme will be a disincentive to economic migrants who do not have a well founded fear of persecution, £35 million for 1999/2000, £300 million for 2000/2001 and £250 million for 2001/2002 was allocated in the Comprehensive Spending Review. This was based on estimated costs: it compared with spending of about £400 million a year when the Government announced its immigration and asylum strategy in July 1998, which would have increased to £800 million by 2002 if remedial action had not been taken'.

## Racist Britain

In 1979 the Revolutionary Communist Group launched its newspaper. We called it *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* specifically because the left at that time was taken up with campaigning against racism and fighting the National Front but did not seriously oppose imperialist plunder abroad. In particular, it did not link that oppression to the situation here. The Communist Party, for example, believed it was possible for Britain to implement 'non-racist' immigration controls. Our position was then, and still is, that in an imperialist nation such as Britain, any immigration legislation will, by definition, be racist.

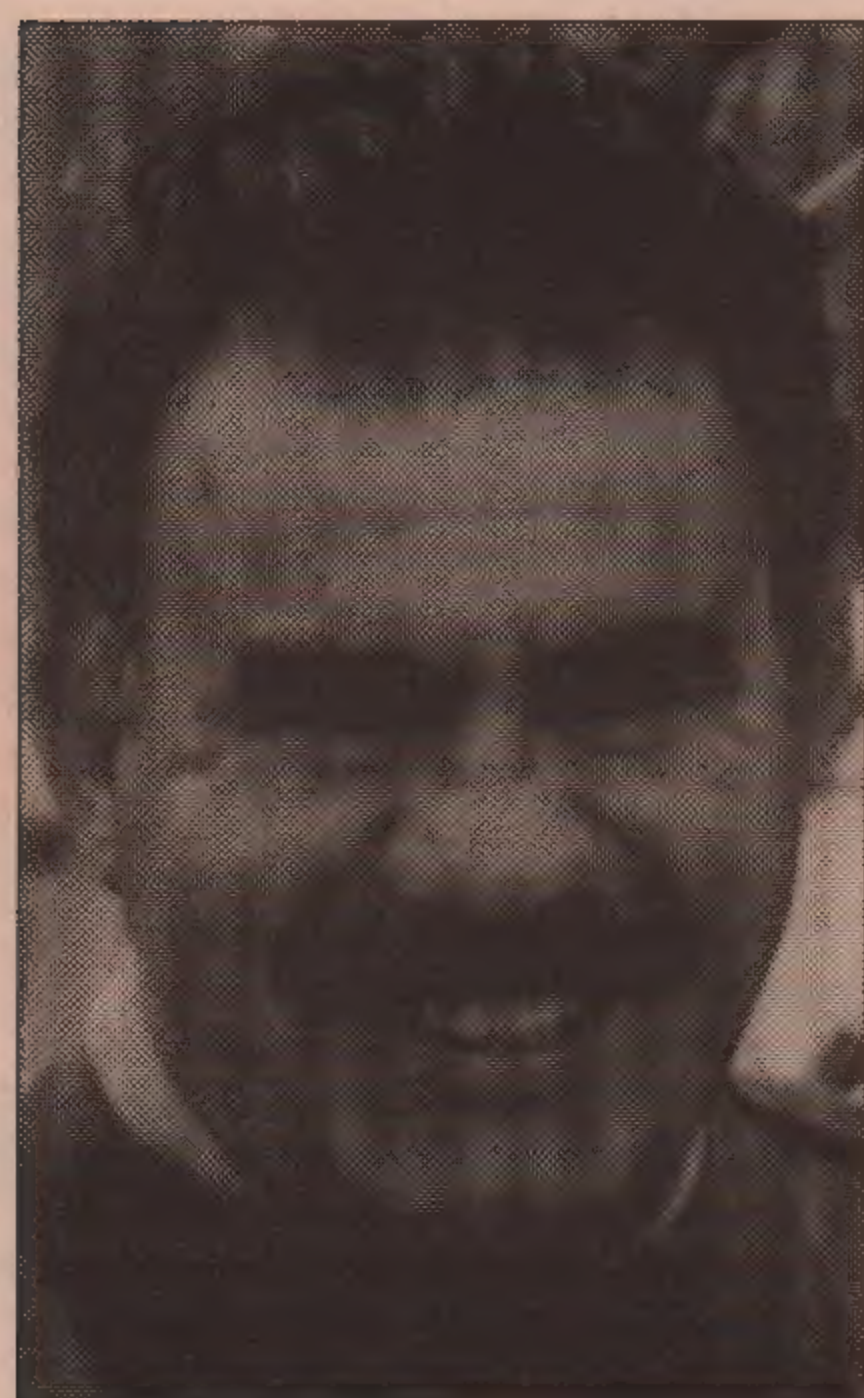
When an imperialist nation oppresses other nations, either through direct colonisation, or via its multinationals or by 'policing' countries such as Iraq and former Yugoslavia through the UN, NATO or collaboration with the US, it draws a line between its 'own' working class and that of the working class in the oppressed nations. It fuels this division by encouraging racism among the 'home' working class. Fighting racism is not therefore just a question of improving race relations in Britain, nor is it simply one of liberal support for oppressed groups abroad. A real struggle against racism is still a question of fighting imperialism - the link between the struggles is all important. It's a link which Blair and Straw specifically don't want us to make and are deliberately obscuring when they promise to root out institutionalised racism, even as they bring in the next law which institutionalises it yet more deeply.

Nicki Jameson





With the seizure of Abdullah Ocalan by the Turkish state on 16 February the Kurdish national liberation struggle enters a new phase. Upon news of Ocalan's capture, Kurds across Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia responded with tremendous anger and militancy. They blamed the CIA, Mossad and the Greek government for conniving at Ocalan's kidnap. They also expressed betrayal by European governments which denied Ocalan refuge and refused the opportunity of Ocalan's stay in Rome to seek a peaceful settlement to the Kurdish question. Betrayal is most damaging by those close to you, those you did not recognise as false friends. Ocalan's capture contains vital lessons for the Kurdish struggle and for the struggle of oppressed people everywhere. **TREVOR RAYNE reports.**



Abdullah Ocalan

# KURDS

## from the mountains to the ba

**A**bdullah Ocalan, leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), was expelled from Syria on 19 November 1998 as Turkish troops gathered along Syria's northern border and Israeli forces threatened from the south. The USA brokered an Israel-Turkey defence pact in 1996, including sharing intelligence, training and joint manoeuvres. In September 1998 the USA gave \$7.3 million to the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union Of Kurdistan (PUK) of northern Iraq/south Kurdistan to stop fighting each other and turn their guns on the PKK instead.

On 12 November Ocalan arrived in Rome, via Moscow, and asked for political asylum. He said he had two choices, 'going back to the mountains and fighting with the guerrillas or trying to initiate peace talks', adding 'we want to do as the Basques and the IRA. We ask for greater autonomy and freedom, respect for our language and culture and democracy as in the rest of Europe.'

The social democratic Italian government would not grant Ocalan asylum even as Ocalan offered to be tried in Europe and seemed willing to make concessions to European social democracy. The PKK had declared a unilateral ceasefire and Ocalan made it clear he wanted an end to the armed struggle against the Turkish state. The Italian government refused to comply with the Turkish state's request for extradition, citing the fact that the Turkish state retains the death penalty. Germany, where there is a warrant for his arrest, also refused to request his extradition.

Under pressure from the Italian government Ocalan left Rome on 16 January. He stayed in Moscow until 29 January. Under protection of members of the Greek Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (Pasek), the governing party of Greece, Ocalan was flown around Europe and attempted to land in the Netherlands, intending to appeal to the International Court of Justice in The Hague. His plane was refused landing rights. Arriving in Athens, the Greek government removed Ocalan to Corfu. From Corfu, Ocalan was flown to the Kenyan capital Nairobi; Ocalan believed he was going to South Africa. Kenya is the CIA's African headquarters.

The US trap worked, but it would not have been possible without the help of the Greek government and Ocalan's belief in the potentially sympathetic role of European governments. This was a serious political mistake, but one that representatives of European social democracy encouraged him to make.

As news of Ocalan's kidnap broke, Kurds attacked and occupied Greek embassies across Europe. In London 79 Kurds occupied the Greek embassy while hundreds of supporters gathered outside. After 3 days the Kurdish protestors left the embassy to be arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and charged under the Public Order Act. Four Kurds were shot dead outside the Israeli embassy in Berlin.

On 16 March the Governor of Istanbul said there had been 300 attacks in the city since the capture of Ocalan. The People's Liberation Army of Kurdistan (ARGL), the armed wing of the PKK, announced

that 'Every area of Turkey is a war zone, including those areas designated tourist areas by the Turkish state.'

Showing their prize on Turkish television, the Turkish military seemed to have disoriented, possibly drugged, Ocalan. European lawyers were denied access to him. Turkish law allows prisoners to be interviewed in private, without a military presence. Ocalan's lawyers in Turkey could not see him except in the company of balaclava-clad soldiers. As the lawyers left Ocalan they were asked to sign documents giving him a clean bill of health. When they refused they were physically attacked. Wherever the lawyers appeared in the streets fascist mobs, directed by the state, surrounded them. When one of the lawyers issued a press release objecting, he was arrested and held in a cell for five hours.



Demonstrators arrested under the PTA at the end of the Embassy occupation in London

Over 30,000 people have been detained by the Turkish state in the aftermath of Ocalan's arrest, many are Kurdish, routinely tortured and some killed. Particularly targeted are members of HADEP, the mainly Kurdish, open and legal political party. The state prosecutor seeks to ban HADEP and so prevent it from standing in the forthcoming general elections.

### Strategically vital struggle

On the day that news of Ocalan's kidnap broke, the *Financial Times* reported that Turkey would continue to allow its air bases to be used by US and British forces to over-fly Iraq, and that \$4.5 billion worth of Turkish state energy interests were to be privatised. In the balance between oil, power and profits on the one hand and the rights of the Kurds on the other, the Kurds have weighed negligibly this century.

Kurdish territories cover an area twice the size of Britain. There are over 30 million Kurds, making them the most numerous stateless people. Their territory cuts a swathe through one of the most strategic and mineral-rich regions in the world. Kurdistan contains the headwaters of the regionally vital Tigris and Euphrates rivers; vital for Turkey, Syria and Iraq. Kurdistan borders 66.4% of the world's oil reserves.

Between 1915 and 1925 the

British, variously in the guises of Lawrence of Arabia, Royal Dutch Shell and the Foreign Office offered oil-rich northern Iraq/south Kurdistan to the Grand Shereef of Mecca, the French, the Kurds themselves in the 1920 Treaty of Sevres and Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company (ESSO). Finally, with the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, the British government awarded the area to itself and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (BP). Thus was Kurdistan's fate determined. The post 1914-18 war settlement established Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey at the expense of the Kurds. The Kurds are distributed within these states and in the diaspora. Britain has a great historical responsibility for what happens to the Kurds.

The Iraqi, Iranian, Syrian and Turkish states were established on the suppression of Kurds. Opposition within these states has always gravitated towards an alliance with the Kurds. The Kurdish struggle is the key to progress and democracy in Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey. As such it is a threat to the regional status quo which has so well served British and US interests.

For 66 of their 78 years in the Turkish Republic Kurdish people have lived under states of emergency and martial law. They have been the object of an assimilation exercise forbidding them to be educated in Kurdish, publish in Kurdish, broadcast in Kurdish. Kurds cannot organise politically as Kurds or use the name Kurd or Kurdish in any of their organisations' names. They cannot speak at political meetings in Kurdish without facing 15 years in gaol. Four Kurdish MPs were gaoled in 1994; evidence against them included wearing red, yellow and green clothes, Kurdish colours. They were gaoled for 15 years. Every attempt at forming a legal parliamentary expression of the Kurds has been banned, scores of members have been killed by state forces - official and auxiliary. Per capita income in the west of Turkey ranges from \$3,000 to \$7,000 a year. In the east, where the Kurds live, it ranges from under \$863 to \$1,361.

Three military coups in Turkey 1960, 1971 and 1980 shared the common stated objective of putting down 'separatist movements', ie the Kurds. The PKK was formed in 1978 to establish a united, free and independent Kurdistan. Its guiding ideology was Marxism-Leninism. The 1980 coup was followed by severe repression of the left and the Kurds. Over 5,000 Kurds were brought to military courts in mass trials. Their lawyers were frequently arrested, tortured and killed. The armed struggle was launched by the PKK with the founding of the ARGL on 15 August 1984.

As the armed struggle gathered strength so imperialism responded: since 1985 Turkey has been the third largest recipient of US aid after Israel and Egypt. Dutch, Spanish, Italian, German and French firms have all invested in Turkey's military industrial complex, as have Britain's Marconi and Land Rover.

March 1990 saw an outbreak of support for the PKK on the streets of southeast Turkey/northwest Kurdistan. It was accompanied by rallies, strikes and school boycotts. Over 30

Kurds were killed and 200 injured when Turkish troops fired in demonstrators. In April 1990 the Turkish government passed Decree 413, empowering governors of Kurdish provinces to depopulate the region. The strategy was to empty the sea to catch the PKK fish. Today over 3,000 villages are destroyed, leaving 4.1 million refugees in Turkey.

In August 1990 the Turkish government officially abrogated the European Human Rights Convention which it was a signatory, thereby announcing it would not recognise the human rights of Kurds. Some 30-35,000 people have been killed in the Turkish state's war. More writers are in gaol in Turkey than any other country. Sixty-seven journalists and newspaper distributors have been killed for attempting to report what was happening in Kurdistan. Amnesty International, the Red Cross and Lord Avebury, head of the British Parliamentary Human Rights Group, are banned from Turkey.

Turkish forces bombed northern Iraq in October 1991, as the PKK attempted to establish a provisional government straddling the Iraqi border. Neither the British or US governments condemned these raids or their so-called 'protected zone', nor have they condemned repeated Turkish army incursions into Iraq since. NATO's General Secretary explained that in the context of instability in the Soviet Union and from the Balkans through the Middle East to North Africa, 'Contacts with Turkey have to be strengthened. Between 1992-96 Turkey was the second biggest spender on conventional weapons in the world. Its chief suppliers were the USA, Germany, Britain and France, in that order.

Newroz (Kurdish New Year),

## The Kurds

**British domestic policy towards Kurds is a warning to us all: opposition to the state is being criminalised.**

- May to July 1989 3,000 Kurds arrived in Britain. 23 June the Home Office imposed visa restrictions on immigration from Turkey. Amnesty International reported two plane-loads of refugees denied entry into Britain and returned to Istanbul. Kurds and Turks detained at Winchester and Dorchester prisons and Latchford House staged hunger strikes protesting their detention. 28 February 1989 60 people raided a workshop in London's East End, arresting 31 Kurds and seven Turks on suspicion of having broken immigration law.
- January 1991 two weeks before the Gulf Storm against Iraq Stoke Newington police attacked striking Kurdish and Turkish workers in north London, 26 people arrested. 38 demonstrators outside Stoke Newington police station were arrested.
- March 1992 400 Kurds gathered outside the Turkish embassy in London's Belgrave Square to protest against Newroz massacre. Set upon by over 100 police using batons, over 30 people were injured, nine hospitalised, 17 arrested, four of whom denied medical treatment for 8 hours. On 1 day the Turkish military chief of staff talks with the Foreign Office in London.
- From 1992 onwards articles in *Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *Sunday*



# ricades

March 1992, was greeted with a mass popular movement on the streets of Kurdish towns across Turkey. Over 100 Kurds were gunned down by state forces. In August that year Turkish planes bombed the city of Sirnak. Other towns were bombed and shelled as the Turkish state demonstrated its military superiority over the PKK. Half a million Turkish troops covered the Kurdish areas, road blocks were mounted every 5-6 kilometers, torture centres established, (the Anti-Terror Law passed in 1991 forbids the naming of torturers), death squads were unleashed – the entire grisly paraphernalia of 'counter-insurgency', which persists to this day.

## Britain's role

British Conservative, Labour and Liberal governments have vigorously deployed force to suppress the Kurds in whatever part of Kurdistan they have risen to challenge the regional status quo.

The RAF bombed rebellious Kurds in northern Iraq/south Kurdistan throughout the 1920s. This was the first use of chemical weapons against civilians. When southern Kurds rebelled in the 1940s the RAF returned to bomb again. In 1946 the USA, backed by Britain, twice threatened the use of nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union if the Red Army intervened to protect newly established Kurdish and Azeri republics from the Shah of Iran's forces. From 1963-64 British weapons supplied Iraq to defeat Kurdish revolt. From 1957 Savak, the Shah's secret police, were given a free hand in Kurdish areas. They were trained by the British SAS, four of whom were killed by Kurdish Fedayeen in 1972.



Over 30,000 people have been detained by the Turkish state in the aftermath of Ocalan's arrest

Since the 1991 Gulf War, US and British planes have provided the Turkish military with intelligence reports on PKK movements in the Turkey-Iraq border areas. After the March 1992 Newroz massacres Foreign Secretary Hurd visited Ankara and sympathised with the Turkish state for its 'terrorist problem in the south east of the country'. When Lord Rea recently asked a

Labour government spokesperson in the House of Lords whether Britain was providing military training to the Turkish forces, the reply was, 'It is normal practice between NATO nations'.

Western imperialism views Turkey as a forward base for overseeing the Middle East oil reserves and a channel for investment into and resources from the Caspian Basin and Central

Asia. British multinational firms have their own specific interests. Margaret Thatcher made the first European invitation to 1980 coup leader General Evren, when he visited Britain in 1988. Her public relations firm Saatchi and Saatchi was appointed by the Turkish government.

British Aerospace, GEC, Land Rover, Short Brothers, Siemens

Plessey and Marconi have all sold weapons to Turkey. Thames Water Plc, Balfour Beatty and Alexander Gibb have made substantial investments in Turkey's infrastructure. BP has investments and Unilever is Turkey's biggest food company. BAT Industries launched a joint venture with Tekel, the state tobacco and alcohol firm. Shell and National Power are lining up to take advantage of the imminent energy privatisations. The British accountancy and consultancy firm Coopers and Lybrand is drafting a regulatory framework to prepare the energy industry for the sell off.

British imperialism is up to its neck in Turkey. With Turkey's ruling class having so much to offer British business it was impossible that Labour's 'ethical foreign policy' would extend to sympathy for the Kurds.

## The struggle continues

The Kurdish national liberation struggle is a lower orders movement and as such it is viewed by imperialism as a threat to one of the most critical regions in the world. Whatever the views of individual members of the Labour Party, the Greek Pasok, or the Italian, French or German social democratic parties, these parties are tied to imperialism, defend capitalism, oppose internationalism. They would never support the Kurds unless the Kurdish movement was no longer a threat to the Middle Eastern status quo and hence a bourgeois movement like the KDP and PUK.

Kurds must work with what support they can find and from wherever, but it is a strategic mistake to orientate work primarily towards winning over social democracy. Nowhere have divisions between the major capitalist powers resulted in a positive attitude towards the Kurds that can defend them, either in Europe or Turkey. Whatever disputes flare up between European governments and the Turkish state, the trade still flows and Kurds are still repressed in Europe.

For as long as imperialism is prepared to finance and arm the Turkish state and for as long as that state is buttressed by Turkish chauvinism, it can fight a long war against the Kurds.

As the Kurdish struggle gathered pace in the early 1990s many Kurds believed victory was near. The ARGK received more potential recruits than it could train, as young Kurds took to the mountains. Yet a guerrilla army cannot beat a well organised and equipped imperialist army on its own; 'the party of the proletariat can never regard guerrilla warfare as the only, or even as the chief, method of struggle', Lenin. The PKK was unable to secure a stable base in northern Iraq/south Kurdistan and to adequately defend Kurdish villages and towns. The ability to sustain armed struggle against such powerful foes is testament to the determination and ability of the PKK and Kurds. However, the strategy must be rethought.

In what is a protracted war, understanding the class basis of potential friends and enemies is critical. The collapse of the socialist bloc makes the balance of class forces globally unfavourable to the Kurdish struggle. Hence Syria's response to pressure in ejecting Ocalan. The Kurds will be manoeuvred towards accommodation with social democracy in the absence of any easy alternative, but it is always a retreat. In Europe it is among the poorest and most oppressed of the working class that the Kurds will find their most consistent support, those in the fight against racism and immiseration. Now, with millions of Kurds in the big cities of western Turkey, the fate of the Kurds is increasingly linked to that of the Turkish working class. Kurds have entered the terrain from which to destabilise the base of reaction. The struggle must extend from the mountains to the barricades.

## s in Britain

graph, *The Independent* and *Evening Standard* have made unproven accusations of extortion, drug running etc against the Kurdish and Turkish communities. Their purpose is to isolate Kurds from sympathy from human rights groups, some parliamentarians and churches and people in Britain. An isolated target is easier to hit.

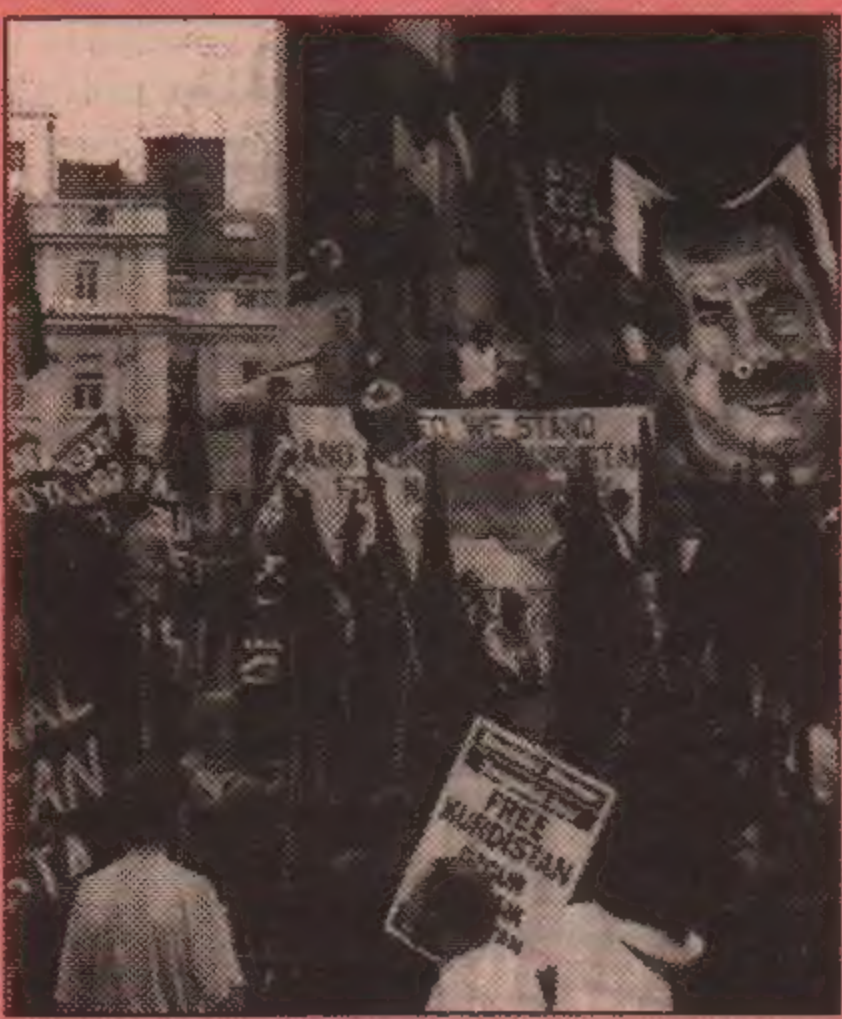
• November 1993 85 Kurds arrested by French police. In Germany 60,000 police raided Kurdish premises. 35 Kurdish organisations closed down. Thousands of proceedings began against people for possession of pro-Kurdish newspapers, leaflets, T-shirts, flags, etc. Three German citizens charged with supporting the PKK for selling the German language magazine *Kurdistan Report*. The British National Criminal Intelligence Service accused the PKK of extorting £2.5 million from the Turkish population of north London.

• Foreign Secretary Hurd, visiting Ankara in January 1994, 'We do not believe an independent Kurdistan is possible'. Britain had arrested 66 Kurdish 'extremists' and convicted 26 in the past year, he added.

• Stella Rimington used the maiden M15 broadcast to attack the Kurds, the only group along with the IRA mentioned by name as a threat to national security. The Metropolitan Police announced a special team to tackle the Kurdish and Turkish communities. Surveillance teams assigned

to community buildings.

• Kani Yilmaz, European Spokesperson of the PKK, arrived at the invitation of British MPs to address the Houses of Parliament on the prospects of a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question and was seized by Metropolitan Police outside the Palace of Westminster on 26 October 1994.



Detained in Belmarsh Prison as a threat to national security he was eventually deported to Germany by the Labour government on 19 August 1997. Kani Yilmaz's very attempt to get a peaceful settlement to the Kurdish conflict was criminalised.

• Kurds maintained a non-stop protest outside the Home Office from 26 October to 17 November 1994, defying police intimidation to protest Kani Yilmaz's

detention. 17 November 2,000 Kurds gathered outside Bow Street magistrates court where Kani Yilmaz was to appear. Police laid into them with dogs and truncheons. Two Kurds were hospitalised with head injuries and five arrested.

• Of three Kurds convicted in August 1994 of a petrol bomb attack on a Turkish bank in the City of London, two received 15-year sentences the other 12 years. All three maintain their innocence and claim police tampered with evidence. One of the three, Cafer Kovaycin, was attacked with boiling oil in Swaleside Prison on 10 October 1994. Kovaycin almost died from the burns. Chained by his leg to a hospital bed, an armed guard was placed over him. The Crown Prosecution Service said it did not have enough evidence to prosecute anyone for the attack.

• Kovaycin's attackers were paid by Turkish intelligence agents operating in this country. These agents attacked photographer Richard Wayman on a London street in November 1994. On 29 December 1994 Oli Ozturk was fired on leaving a shop in north London. The real target is believed to have been Nafiz Bostanci, a leading member of the Turkish and Kurdish communities in London.

• July 1996 the Foreign Office told British Telecom not to give Kurdish Med-TV access to satellites and expressed anger at the Independent Television Commission (ITC) for issuing Med-TV with a licence. Nevertheless, Med-TV broadcasts to Turkey and the Middle East.

• 13 November 1997 Horseferry Road Magistrates Court issued a warrant under the Prevention of Terrorism Act authorising a search for 'evidence of contributions towards acts of terrorism (money, accounting records, computer records and other documentation)'. 19 November 1997, *Evening Standard* front page headline, 'New Law to Drive the Terrorists from London', after Home Secretary Jack Straw spoke the same day promising a 'major overhaul' of anti-terrorist legislation. Straw accepted a Conservative government commissioned report recommending the addition of Middle Eastern and other groups to the list of 'officially proscribed' organisations.

• 20 November 1997 8am police raided two London Turkish and Kurdish community centres using the 13 November warrant, taking away computers, floppy disks, bank statements, cheque books, photographs etc. That day the broadsheet newspapers ran the *Evening Standard* story.

• 24 November 1997 *The Times* diplomatic editor called for the PKK to be outlawed. A year later the police returned the property confiscated unable to press any charges. By then the 1998 Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act was on the statutes.

• 22 March 1999 the ITC orders Med-TV off the air. The Foreign Office says it supports the move. For years Kurds were 'hung in obscurity'. The Turkish state and British government would like to restore the custom.



# Frankenstein foods: 'a piece of the action'

In August 1998, Dr Arpad Pusztai, an expert on genetic modification (GM), gave an interview to *World in Action*. Pusztai worked for the reputable Rowett Research Institute in Aberdeen. His experiments, feeding genetically-modified potatoes to rats, had shown alarming changes in the rats' major organs, shrinkage of brains and compromised immune systems. Pusztai suggested that the general public are being used as guinea pigs in a vast experiment with food. Three days later he was suspended and denied access to his research results. Everyone pretended that Pusztai was simply a maverick.

Six months later, with the backing of 20 reputable research scientists, it became clear that Pusztai is not a maverick and his research findings are solid. The experiments involved the transfer of the snowdrop lectin (a natural insecticide) into potatoes, using the cauliflower mosaic virus as a promoter. The promoter is used in most GM foods – it turns the transferred gene on and off. As part of the experiments, Pusztai fed the rats non-GM potatoes, or potatoes and the snowdrop lectin (as a powder), or the GM potatoes. Only the rats fed GM potatoes were affected. This clearly suggested that it is the genetic modification which produces ill effects, not the mere presence of the snowdrop lectin.

The statements backing Pusztai's research had a dramatic effect.

## Labour promotes 'progress'

Enter the Labour Government, anxious to smother another food scandal at birth. Prime Minister Blair pronounced GM foods totally safe and suitable for all his family. As a PR move, this was a mistake, simply calling to mind Tory minister Gummer's young daughter being force-fed beefburgers during the BSE crisis. The call to ban the growing of GM crops in Britain and for clear labelling of GM products, is deeply threatening to Labour, not least because they are hand-in-glove with the GM food producers. During Labour's short period in power, they have offered GM companies, including the giant US multinational Monsanto, millions of pounds as an inducement to expand their UK operations. Representatives of GM companies have met government officials or ministers 81 times since Labour came to power. Critics of GM foods have been labelled Luddites – opposers of progress. Surely, they argue, a new dynamic business which could bring untold rewards to the British economy deserves some leeway. So, under the guise of scientific 'progress', Labour is backing big business.

Enter Lord Sainsbury, Minister of Science, former Chair of Sainsbury's supermarkets. Lord Sainsbury owns two companies, Innotech and Diotech, both directly involved in GM foods. He also owns the cauliflower mosaic virus gene promoter. He also controls a 'charitable' trust, the Gatsby Foundation (yes, it is named after Scott Fitzgerald's millionaire playboy), which has funded research into GM food to the tune of £18 million. Sainsbury, an SDP supporter who switched to the Labour Party when Blair became leader, has also bankrolled the Labour Party, reputedly to the tune of £3 million. It was claimed that Lord Sainsbury does not take part in cabinet discussions on biotechnology, so there is no conflict of interest. Then it was claimed that he may take part, but this does not matter because he has no financial interest in GM foods, having put all his financial interests in a 'blind trust' when he became a minister. The purpose of this trust is to keep us all 'blind' to what is really going on. Is Sainsbury meant to have forgotten that he owns two GM companies, a gene and the Gatsby Foundation? With such very direct connections between the GM industry

and government, it is no wonder that Labour is resisting all calls for the banning and control of GM foods.

Enter David Hill, Labour's chief spin doctor until a year ago, when he became adviser to Monsanto on media strategy. Media strategy hasn't been Monsanto's forte. In February the Advertising Standards Authority upheld eight of 13 complaints against Monsanto's £1 million advertising campaign ('biotechnology can feed the world...let the harvest begin') which claimed, among other things, that GM foods had been rigorously tested over 20 years and would solve the world's food shortages. The ASA found the adverts 'wrong, unproven, misleading and confusing'. No tests, rigorous or otherwise, have been carried out on GM foods and biotechnology in their hands is much more likely to deepen world poverty than otherwise.

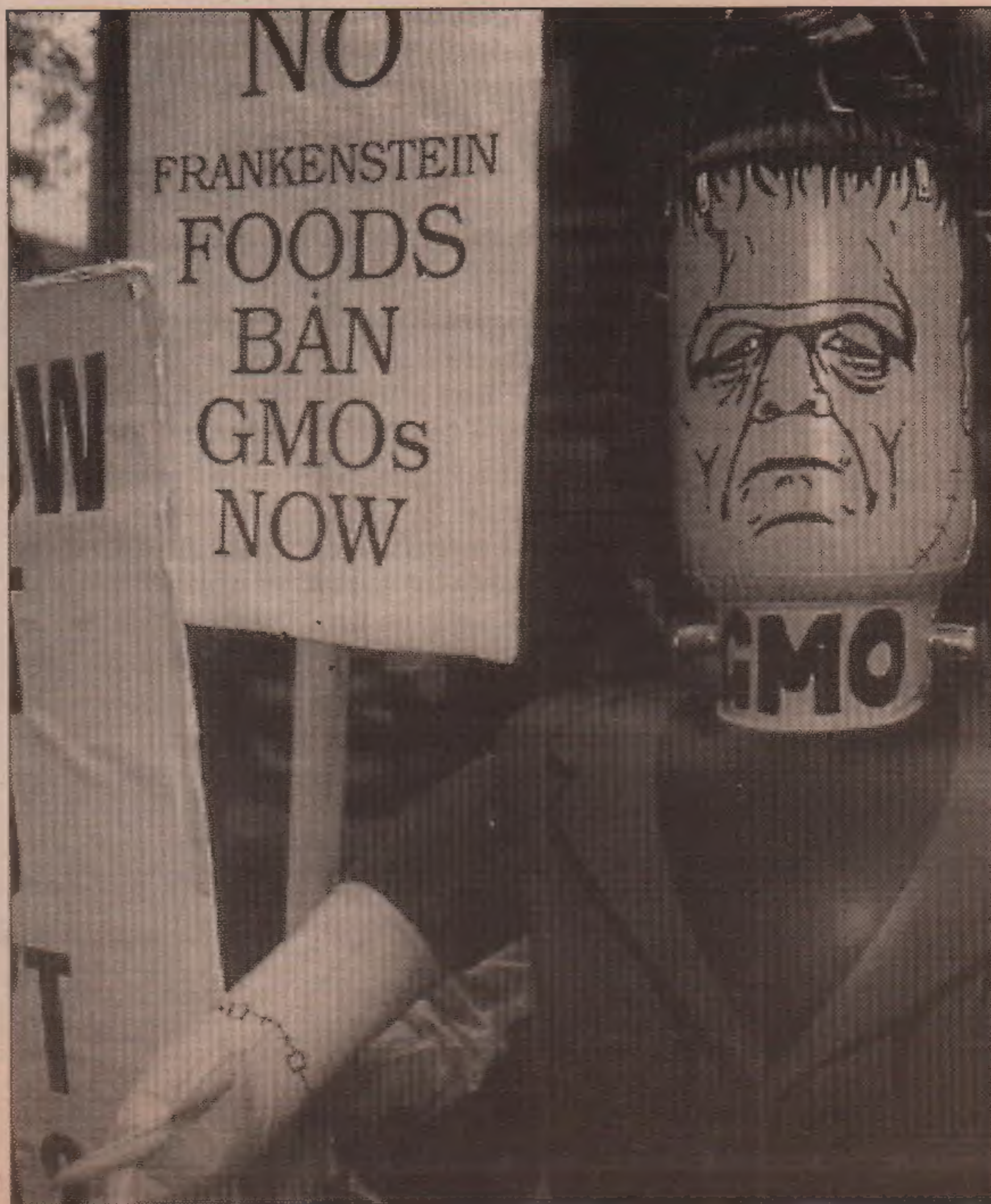
Monsanto was in further trouble in March when it was fined £17,000 for allowing an experimental crop of Roundup Ready oilseed rape in Lincolnshire to breach field barriers designed to stop its spread or cross pollination with surrounding crops. But the fine was pitiful – a drop in the ocean. No wonder that green protesters have taken matters into their own hands by destroying such crops. Monsanto has lived up to its litigious reputation by invoking a draconian injunction against activists which leaves them legally responsible for any damage to GM crops in the UK at any time. Following the Lincolnshire fines, Monsanto and Zeneca (another GM company) pledged to fight any ban on GM foods in Britain. Under international treaty their position is strong. The arbiter of any disputes about import bans, the World Trade Organisation, is designed to favour 'free trade' and, therefore, the unbridled growth of biotechnology.

By now you have a complete picture of how the GM industry operates. Infiltrate and lobby government; bully, discredit and silence all opposition; lie about the benefits of GM foods. Contrary to the image they promote of consumer-friendliness, progressive science and altruism, Monsanto and other multinationals are dedicated to one thing: making a profit. They are privatising, on a global scale, what have hitherto been products of nature. By transferring genes, which they own, staple crops like maize, wheat, corn, soya etc, and their seed, become the property of private companies which then sell them at a massive profit and protect their property interests with a vengeance. The benefits of such food are few and the dangers are deliberately hidden. This is what the Labour government is protecting. An examination of Monsanto's history in the USA is illuminating.

## The Monster Multinational

The USA has 50 million acres growing GM crops – mainly soya, corn, cotton and potatoes. Half of all soya products and 75% of processed foods contain GM ingredients. The rate of increase has been enormous and it is predicted that within a decade all major crops in the USA will be genetically modified.

Monsanto, the USA's leading biotechnology corporation, began life as a chemical company, producing some of the most dangerous chemicals in existence:



- PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls). 1.2 million tonnes of PCBs have been released into the environment and the results are deadly for all mammals. Monsanto continued to market PCBs long after the deadly effects were clear.

- Monsanto was one of the main companies supplying the defoliant Agent Orange for use in the Vietnam war. Agent Orange contained large doses of dioxins which poison the environment, cause cancer and congenital deformities: up to 500,000 children have been born in Vietnam with dioxin-related deformities since the 1960s.

Consistently, Monsanto avoided legal responsibility for the effects of its chemicals by fraudulently covering up the real effects.

## Milking the consumers

From the outset of research into biotechnology Monsanto resisted regulation, doctored research findings, and bought political influence with big donations to both the Republicans and Democrats. The Reagan/Bush administrations refused to introduce special regulations governing such research. The result was that while small biotech companies developed the research, Monsanto and other multinationals positioned themselves to buy up and profit from the results.

In 1993 the Food and Drugs Administration (FDA), responsible for licensing all such products in the USA, licensed Monsanto's bovine growth hormone, rBGH (BST), as safe. This hormone increases milk production in treated cattle by 10-20 per cent. It was introduced at a time when the USA had a milk surplus, bought up by the Federal Government for \$2.1 billion a year to prevent price slumps. Problems with the use of the hormone soon became clear to users: increased stress on the cows, uterine disorders and common mastitis (then treated

with antibiotics). rBGH is also associated with prostate and breast cancers in humans.

Monsanto responded to critics in its usual fashion: legal actions. In 1994 the FDA warned retailers not to label milk rBGH-free, arguing it would be unfair to discriminate. The FDA did not 'require things to be on the label just because a consumer might want to know them'. A senior scientist in the FDA, critical of the relationship between the FDA and Monsanto, was sacked and research findings hidden (remember Dr Pusztai). The official at the FDA responsible for the decision against labelling was previously a lawyer advising Monsanto, who later moved back to working for Monsanto. Monsanto issued law suits against producers who refused to comply with the FDA ruling. These law suits have now been withdrawn in the face of consumer outrage but, although the FDA now allows labelling, most milk is still unlabelled. rBGH is banned in Europe, but Monsanto is continuing with attempts to change this.

## Rounding-up the profits

Central to Monsanto's propaganda is the claim that its GM crops will lessen use of pesticides and herbicides. What it downplays is the fact that it is, itself, a major producer of chemical pesticides and herbicides. Its Roundup herbicide is the most commonly used in the USA, and in 1994 was used on 800,000 acres in the UK. Monsanto's solution to the limits of herbicide use – too much kills the crop – has been to develop GM crops described as 'Roundup-Ready', resistant to the toxic effects of the herbicide. It is obvious that crop resistance will lead to more use of chemicals, not less. This means more profits for Monsanto, as more and more agriculture is locked into purchase of Roundup-Ready seed and Roundup herbicide. For the envi-

ronment the effects could be devastating as the chemical is damaging, not only to plant life, but also to a wide variety of organisms including humans.

Monsanto has gone a step further. When farmers buy Roundup-Ready seed they pay a special 'technology fee' and contract not to use any harvested seed from the crop in the future. Monsanto has used the Pinkerton Detective Agency to spy on its customers and it has taken farmers to court for using harvested seed. This is the complete privatisation of the natural cycle.

## Terminating life

Monsanto has now bought and developed what has become known as Terminator Technology. GM crops have been developed with 'self-terminating offspring' – effectively they are sterile. Each year the farmer will be forced back on to the market to buy seed and the side effects on the environment of such genetic suicide are unpredictable. In the Third World 15 to 20 per cent of the food supply is grown by small farmers who save their seed. These farmers feed at least 1.4 billion people. The effects of Terminator Technology could be devastating.

Already the world is feeling the effects of 'free trade' of GM crops and products. The directors of Monsanto have very strong links with the Clinton administration, and as a result the USA has successfully prevented any real control or labelling of GM foods internationally. GM soya has been mixed with natural soya, so that a vast array of processed foods are infected and the consumer is virtually unable to make a choice. Countries do not have any real control over the import of GM crops and any that independently block US imports will face legal action. The privatisation of world food production in the hands of a few multinationals will have its worst effects in the poorest countries.

Monsanto's corporate traditions ought to be familiar to anyone with knowledge of the development of capitalism. The motive is not progress, nor benefits to humanity, but simple raw profit and its maximisation on a global level whatever the consequences. At every turn Monsanto and the other biotechnology giants oppose labelling, oppose controls, resist scientific safety trials, doctor the evidence, subvert the scientists and politicians and avoid any legal responsibility for the consequences of their Frankenstein foods. The GM multinationals are determined to break into the European market, as a prelude to world domination of the agriculture. So when Dr Pusztai gets the sack, when Blair swears to GM safety, when Lord Sainsbury claims financial probity and neutrality, and the Labour government opposes bans in favour of 'progress', remember whose progress they are promoting. It is certainly not ours. Labour simply wants, in traditional capitalist fashion, a piece of the action.

Catherine Gough

More information is available in the excellent edition of *The Ecologist* which was pulped by printers under threat of legal action last year, now reprinted: *The Ecologist*, Vol 28 No 5 Sept/Oct 1998 £3.50.

Genetix Snowball will be holding a Silent Spring Action on Saturday 17 April. For details phone 0161 834 0295.



# Cuba takes further steps to defend the revolution

## US intensifies blockade

The USA has come under increasing pressure, internationally and internally, to loosen some parts of the 40-year-old blockade, which has cost Cuba nearly \$60bn since 1960. Some criticism has come on humanitarian and political grounds. But, increasingly, the protest comes from elements representing US business interests, which are losing out to Canadian and European companies.

Twenty four US senators, 16 of them Republican, have signed a letter to President Clinton requesting that a bipartisan commission be set up to assess the 'suitability' of the blockade. This idea was initially proposed by former high-ranking Republican officials, including Henry Kissinger, Lawrence Eagleburger, Frank Carlucci and Wayne Smith, former chief of the US interest section in Havana. Business interests were represented by the pressure group USA-Engage, which campaigns against the blockade on the grounds that it is obsolete, ineffective and harmful [to their interests]. Even a Foreign Relations Council working group made recommendations including lifting the blockade on food sales and a limited authorisation for US companies to operate in Cuba.

Under these pressures, for the past year the Clinton administration had indicated that some relaxations in the blockade would be made. However, when it came to it, what he in fact agreed were amendments to the US Federal Budget to focus the blockade still more sharply on channelling support to those elements of the population most easily subverted. Clinton was later thanked for his efforts by the rabidly anti-Castro Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) during a private meeting at the White House in March.

The amendments include a fund of at least \$2 million for private entities and individuals 'struggling for democracy' in Cuba, as established in Title 1 of the Helms-Burton Act. They also eliminated limits on money that can be sent by US citizens and NGOs to their counterparts in Cuba.

The amendments further authorise US companies to sell medicines to Cuban NGOs, agricultural products such as fertiliser to private farmers and food to the private restaurant sector. The first change aims to increase the influence of religious organisations in Cuba, particularly the Catholic church, which is allowed to hand out donated medicines. The private restaurant sector is so small that the amount of food supplied will be small, but it will have a major political effect on a sector which has some of the highest earners in Cuba. Cuba's National Association of Small Farmers hit the nail on the head when they stated: 'We Cuban farmers know that the US's Cuba policy has not changed, nor will it change as a result of measures that seem to be a loosening but are actually a tightening of the ruthless and unfair blockade that they have enforced against our homeland since 1959.' The US is even trying to insist that the estimated \$200,000 television profits due to Cuba from an exhibition baseball match at the end of March between the Cuban national team and the Baltimore Orioles must be channelled via Caritas, the Catholic charity.

The Cuban state has recently stepped up measures to defend itself from an increasingly comprehensive and multi-pronged attack by the United States. US methods have ranged from the crude – the 40-year blockade, assassination attempts, bombs, sabotage and biological warfare – to the more subtle. These include granting illegal Cuban immigrants status as political refugees, TV and radio propaganda broadcasts to encourage illegal immigration, dissidence and counter-revolution and actively abetting Cuban-American groups involved in terrorism. They also provide financial and material aid to counter-revolutionary groupings in Cuba as well as to religious groups and potentially subversive elements of the population. Cuba has been forced onto the offensive to defend its revolution. Inevitably, the international bourgeois press has reported recent events in Cuba as a sign that the revolution and Castro himself are losing control, alongside their usual hysteria about 'human rights abuses'. From Havana, TANIA JACKSON assesses the situation.

## The revolution responds

Cuba's response to this new phase of economic, political and ideological warfare has been to introduce the Act for the Protection of National Independence and the Economy. This introduces specific measures against collaboration with US imperialist ambitions in Cuba, such as 3-8 year gaol sentences for those found guilty of receiving money or resources from the US government for counter-revolutionary activity.

As the USA and its allies responded with customary indignation, Cuban vice-president Carlos Lage replied: '[the Act] has been presented by those who hold a monopoly over information as an attack on freedom of thought and opinions, whereas no one is sanctioned for the latter in Cuba. That Act... penalises crimes of collaborating with the enemy, not of opinion.' He condemned US hypocrisy: 'No one has the right to attack a country for 40 years, nor try to criminally blockade it into submission, or finance the annexationist dreams and counter-revolutionary activities of isolated groups who are selling out their homeland, and accuse it later for having acted in its own defence.' (Speech to 55th session of the Human Rights Commission in Geneva.)

Cuba is continuing its clampdown on anti-social as well as politically-motivated crime (see reports in FRFI 146 Dec 1998/Jan 1999 and 147 Feb/March 1999). The Cuban National Assembly in March modified its penal code to increase maximum sentences for certain crimes that have resurfaced during the special period, particularly those related to tourism – pimping, corruption of minors, violent robbery, murder and drug trafficking. It also focuses on 'trafficking in people', which relates specifically to those individuals who make a lucrative living out of smuggling Cuban immigrants into the US by boat, charging up to \$8,000 per person. The US has always encouraged illegal Cuban immigration. These migrants receive special status for fleeing 'a communist regime' and are accorded residence rights after one year. No such largesse is shown to Mexican immigrants: those who do not die on the increasingly hazardous journey across the border face swift deportation or living in abysmal conditions as illegal workers, without health cover or rights.

Human traffickers thus exploit the situation, smuggling Cubans into the US and later staging a landing for the



press in a public place. Often the immigrants are held in safe houses until their relatives have paid for their passage. Reuters recently reported a staged landing in Florida of 11 Cubans on Miami Beach. The men were surprisingly clean-shaven and showing no signs of exposure after supposedly nine days on a raft at sea. Fortunately, the famous Cuban-American Emilio Estefan, husband of the rabidly anti-Castro singer Gloria Estefan, just 'happened' to be jogging along the beach when they arrived and was able to fetch them coffee from a nearby hotel he happens to own!

To carry out its war on crime, a recruitment drive to the police has been launched. The Union of Young Communists is encouraging its own cadre and youth in general to join. 30,000 people have responded so far.

## Dissident trials

Inevitably, the international bourgeois press had a field day when the trial of four Cuban dissidents began in March. 'A barometer to measure the intensity of repression!' howled Spanish newspaper *El Pais*. They particularly objected to not being allowed into the trial and that shortly

before the trial started a number of leading counter-revolutionaries were detained to prevent them parading before the media circus. They seemed rather less concerned that their so-called 'prisoners of conscience' were in fact four self-appointed leaders of the 'Workgroup for Internal Dissidence' and had been funded by the Miami-based counter-revolutionary CANF. Vladimiro Roca, Felix Bonne, Rene Gomez Manzano and Marta Beatriz Roque faced charges of incitement to sedition for sending out threatening letters in April 1997 to foreign businesses urging them not to invest in Cuba as well as urging 'compatriots in exile' to fund dissident groups.

The group went on to publish other such letters, as well as granting interviews and making declarations on the illegal US propaganda station, Radio Marti. They gave press conferences at their homes, to which the same group of foreign journalists would always eagerly turn up.

Amongst their contacts was former CIA agent, terrorist and executive director of CANF, Frank Calzon, then head of Transition for a Free Cuba/Freedom House. In October 1995, Clinton personally and pub-

licly handed over half a million dollars for computer equipment, publications and cash for Cuban opposition groups. In 1997, Calzon's emissary was caught in Cuba and deported back to the US for handing out this aid to small counter-revolutionary groups including that led by Vladimiro Roca. Others who offered support to this group were Hubert Matos, general secretary of Independent and Democratic Cuba (one of the most aggressive anti-Cuban terrorist organisations), Jose Basulto, ringleader of Brothers to the Rescue and Ramon Saul Sanchez, terrorist head of the so-called 'Democracy' Movement.

In all this, they had continual contact with and support from the head of the US interests section in Havana, Michael Kozak and the head of the US state department's Cuban Affairs Office, Michael Ranneberger who pledged over \$1m in aid to dissident organisations.

The defendants received sentences of between 42 months and five years. The US immediately put pressure on high-ranking visitors to Cuba to call for the release of these criminals and other 'prisoners of conscience'. *Granma Internacional*, the newspaper of the Cuban Communist Party, pointed out: 'the US government would never yield to the demand for the release of a Puerto Rican patriot condemned to a lengthy prison term or a commutation of a sentence for an African-American or someone of Latin American origin sentenced to death who constitute, almost without exception, the only prisoners to receive this sentence in the United States.'

Meanwhile, the two El Salvadoran mercenaries, Raul Ernesto Cruz Leon and Otto Rodriguez Llerena, who admitted their part in planting a series of bombs in Havana's hotels in the summer of 1997 were tried in March. Cruz Leon has been sentenced to death; Rodriguez Llerena was awaiting sentence at the time of going to press. Both were bought, on the cheap as it were, by Cuban-born arch-terrorist and former CIA agent Luis Posada Carriles at \$1,000 a bomb, with funds provided by his close friend and mentor, the late head of CANF, Jorge Mas Canosa. (For full report on Posada's counter-revolutionary activities, see FRFI 145, October/ November 1998.) Posada had intended the bombs to damage Cuba's tourist trade and at the same time sow doubts abroad about the stability of Cuba's regime, to encourage the Cubans to think he had operatives in the military, and to encourage internal opposition. Despite the death of an Italian tourist in the explosions and the fact that his two hired hands now face possible death sentences, he told the *New York Times* his conscience was clear and 'I sleep like a baby'.

What is clear is that Cuba is taking the necessary steps on every front to defend its revolution against unremitting pressure from the United States and its counter-revolutionary operatives. In doing so it will incur the inevitable vituperation of an international press which wants to see the revolution destroyed, but the unstinting support of the vast majority of the Cuban people and their supporters.





John Maclean

# From imperialist war to socialist revolution

## War and revolution

Within a year this revolutionary internationalist trend had become an unstoppable current in Russia. The Bolsheviks were to lead the working class to power in a torrent of revolution which altered the course of world history. From the cities and glens of Ireland to the steppes of Russia, oppressed nations and the working class served final notice on imperialism and capitalism. War had inevitably sharpened the economic, social and political contradictions within the system to breaking point. Such a general observation was uncontested amongst revolutionaries. However Lenin's genius lay in recognising the particular significance of actual material developments in the imperialist heartlands and the oppressed nations.

## The 1916 Easter Rising in Ireland

Ten days after Maclean's imprisonment for his anti-war activities, James Connolly led the Easter Rising against British imperialism. Maclean was to describe Connolly as 'the brain centre of the Irish working class'. He had regularly read Connolly's newspaper, the *Workers' Republic*, which had covered events on the Clyde in 1915 and early 1916. An earlier version of the paper, edited by James Larkin, had actually been printed in Glasgow and smuggled into Ireland, until Connolly moved the whole operation into Liberty Hall, Dublin. Maclean declared in 1922: 'When Jim Connolly saw how things were going on the Clyde, he determined on the Easter Rising.'

Scotsman Seamus Reader, who became involved in the Rising and subsequent revolutionary struggle through the Scottish Brigade of the IRA, was to endorse this view many years later in a letter to Maclean's daughter:

'Your father was right in his remarks about James Connolly, because anti-conscription and the intended revolt on the Clyde did influence Countess Markievicz, James Connolly and Sean Macdiarmid. They were determined that at least the Liffey should assert itself.'

Lenin saw the Easter Rising as the first great blow against the might of the British Empire:

'The struggle of the oppressed nations of Europe... will sharpen the revolutionary crisis in Europe more than a much more developed rebellion in a remote colony. A blow delivered against the British imperialist bourgeois rule by a rebellion in Ireland is of a hundred times greater political significance than a blow of equal weight in Asia or Africa.'

From this point until his death, Maclean was to share with Lenin this crucial recognition of the relationship between the struggle against imperialism and that of the working class. James Connolly, in word and deed, exemplified this unity and paid the price with his life. He was executed by the British War Cabinet. The

**In 1916, John Maclean in Scotland and Karl Leibknecht in Germany were imprisoned for their opposition to imperialist war. That year Lenin identified these fighters as representing 'a trend of revolutionary internationalism... To this trend belong the Bolsheviks of Russia'.**

Labour MP Arthur Henderson was a member and led other Labour MPs in applause when the news of Connolly's murder reached the House of Commons in May 1916.

## John Maclean - convict 2562

Maclean's conviction and three-year sentence to penal servitude did not undermine his exemplary socialist conduct and principles. But the Clyde workers did not rise to his defence. The question of his imprisonment became something of a problem for the labour movement, which supported the war and, as we have shown (FRFI 147, Feb/March 1999), argued for a socialisation of the war effort not socialist action against it. Glasgow District Council, with a large contingent of Labour councillors, apparently discovered that any petition for release would have to be based on an appeal for leniency from Maclean! Within Parliament it was a Liberal MP who took up the issue. The Labour Party were not interested. Maclean's wife, Agnes, had the sad task of conveying news of this situation to him through the few letters and visits he was permitted. He completely rejected any campaign based



Vi Lenin

on an appeal for mercy and called for a campaign for political rights for political prisoners. Even in Czarist Russia, political prisoners were recognised and were allowed books and writing materials, their own clothes and food, but in bourgeois Scotland there were none of these rights. Maclean was to later describe prison as death and stated: 'I would rather be immediately put to death than condemned to a life sentence in Peterhead.'

The regimes in Scottish prisons were designed to break and destroy. Silence was rigidly enforced, convicts were isolated in individual cells with minimal exercise and an abominable diet. Hard labour in Peterhead aggravated health problems that had arisen through years of activity on



'The Russian Revolution... the beginning of an international rising of workers'

the streets. Agnes Maclean continued struggling for her husband's release, trying to lift his spirits, naturally, but revealing the truth about the cynical, exhausting and ultimately demoralising runaround which the British labour movement passes off as a 'campaign' - then and now. Manipulation of the sincere concerns of relatives and friends, false promises, lies and blatant evasions and sly conspiracies were employed by the ruling class and its agents in the labour movement. His wife told Maclean that: 'The Trades Council and others are urging the Labour Party to get something done for political prisoners.'

George Lansbury, editor of *The Herald*, conceded after Maclean's release: 'I tried to influence some MPs for John but did not achieve much... I think the Russians secured it.'

Nothing was done for Maclean or the other political prisoners. He remained in Peterhead until his health broke down in February 1917, when he was transferred to Perth Prison Infirmary.

## March 1917: the first Russian revolution

In 1916, just after beginning his sentence, Maclean had been elected to the national executive of the British Socialist Party. The pro-war followers of Hyndman had been defeated and the BSP now advanced, at least in words, an open position against the war. Their newspaper, *The Call*, on hearing the news of the Russian revolution which overthrew the Czar and declared political liberty, commented that had Maclean been in prison under the autocracy he would have been restored to his wife and children.

It was the Russian revolution which restored the hopes of John Maclean and socialists throughout

the world. He had been in prison for a year, his health undermined but his revolutionary spirit unbroken. In the coming months the working class of Europe and the world were inspired and encouraged by the March revolution. The ruling classes trembled and conspired as the masses began to determine the future.

## Lenin returns: April 1917

Lenin's return to Russia marked the beginning of the decisive entry of the working class into the battle against war and imperialism. Arriving at the Finland Station in early April 1917, his words were heard by Raskolnikov, a leader of the Red sailors:

'Germany in ferment. In Britain the Government holds John Maclean in prison'... We heard only the conclusion of his speech, which Ilyich [Lenin] ended on a cheerful note, speaking of the Russian Revolution as the beginning of an international rising of workers which drew nearer by the day.'

In Lenin's powerful analysis of the developing revolution, *The April Theses*, he again upheld John Maclean as a representative of working class internationalism:

'the Scottish schoolteacher Maclean, who was sentenced to hard labour by the bourgeois government of Britain for his revolutionary fight against war and hundreds of British socialists who are in gaol for the same offence. They, and they alone, are internationalists in deed.'

This document laid out in precise fashion the argument that the war and the misery and ruin which it had brought on humanity could only be ended by revolution. *The April Theses* concludes:

'The war has brought mankind to the brink of a precipice, to the brink of

the destruction of civilisation, of the brutalisation and destruction of millions, countless millions of human beings. The only way out is through a proletarian revolution... But we are out to rebuild the world.'

'We are out to put an end to the imperialist war into which hundreds of millions of people have been drawn and in which the interests of billions and billions of capital are involved, a war which cannot end in a truly democratic peace without the greatest proletarian revolution in the history of mankind.'

## The release of Maclean

The May Day march in Glasgow in 1917 reflected this rising hope and optimism. 70,000 marched to express solidarity with the Russian Revolution where only a few years before the loyal labour movement had led off the workers with 'God save the King'. At the end of May a huge demonstration again took place which was joined by 200 Russian sailors from a warship anchored on the Clyde; there was no timid and slavish concern expressed for the King's cousin - now an ex-Czar - and the sailors proposed a resolution protesting against the imprisonment of John Maclean.

The significance of the formation that same month of a John Maclean Release Committee with Harry Hopkins of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers as its Secretary must be assessed. The Clyde workers had not risen to defend Maclean - indeed, the Clyde Workers Committee had collapsed at the first threat from the state and refused to organise. However, under the influence of revolutionary developments in Russia and the effects of the war, the working class began to move again. Despite Maclean's international stature, the revolutionary movement in Britain was very weak but the conditions of continuing imperialist war opened up new possibilities for the working class. Nowhere was this better demonstrated than in Russia, where the influence of revolutionary communist politics, of Bolshevik politics, was strengthening every day.

In Britain the ruling class was becoming discredited as the corpses piled higher. Its allies in the working class movement had to place themselves at the head of any new or potential developments in order to destroy them. By design and instinct these opportunists - 'better defenders of the bourgeoisie than the bourgeoisie themselves' as Lenin called them - led campaigns and struggles into safe, respectable channels where they posed no threat to the ruling class, having turned their backs on Maclean while he rotted in prison they set up the Release Committee to maintain control over the rising, spontaneous demands for his release increasingly heard on the Clyde, in Britain and Russia.

In June, the All-Russian Congress of Workers and Soldiers Deputies sent their fraternal greetings to John Maclean: 'the brave fighter for the International, Comrade Maclean, and express their hopes that the new rise of international solidarity will bring him liberty.'

Maclean could not be bribed and his political reasoning began to make sense to thousands of people witnessing and experiencing the carnage of war. That is why he was incarcerated in the hellholes of Scottish prisons.

On 30 June 1917 John Maclean was released, having refused to retreat from or repudiate his revolutionary politics. Within 100 days the working class had taken power in Russia. Socialist revolution had become a reality.

Michael MacGregor



# Risley uprising – ten years on

Ten years ago prisoners at Risley Remand Centre celebrated 1 May in style by taking over a wing of the notoriously squalid, brutal prison and spending three days on the roof. NICKI JAMESON remembers the Risley uprising and analyses its legacy for prisoners' struggle in Britain.

## Gris Ris

In 1988 the Chief Inspector of Prisons Stephen Tumim described Risley as 'barbarous and squalid', 'appalling and totally unacceptable', 'dirty and dilapidated'.

The late 1980s saw a massive increase in prison overcrowding, especially in local prisons and remand centres, some of which had received no refurbishment other than the occasional lick of paint for 100 years. Risley, however, was a modern facility, opened in 1965, to hold 608 prisoners – 514 men and 94 women. Just over twenty years later it was holding 956 prisoners – 831 men and 125 women – and physical conditions were as bad as in the mouldering Victorian prisons.

Prisoners at Risley were in their cells for more than 20 hours a day; the food was revolting and unhygienically prepared and served; there had been three suicides in the space of five weeks yet none of the suicide prevention measures supposedly operational across the prison system were in place.

## The revolt

On 1 May 1989 120 prisoners from D wing assembled in the exercise yard, planning to stage a symbolic sit-down protest to draw attention to the horrific conditions. However, a separate protest the night before on B wing had been put down by the 'MUFTI' squad<sup>1</sup> and it seemed unlikely that such a protest would be able to even begin before there was violent intervention. The D wing men therefore changed tactic and decided to occupy a landing inside the prison. Wadi Williams, describes the events which followed:

'With the MUFTI on the ground floor corridor rushing up the stairs we had a serious head-on confrontation. We were seriously concerned for our safety, given the squad's reputation for gross violence and brutality... We quickly fashioned a barricade and the struggle for control of the wing was on. We were obliged to confront the staves and shields of the MUFTI with whatever was to hand. This included pouring concentrated liquid soap down the stairs to stop them rushing up the stairwell; doors were taken off their hinges and used to barricade the main access area.... After 10-15 minutes we gained control of landing 5 and turned our attention to landing 6... [Then] there was a race between us and the MUFTI as to who would gain control of the flat roof connecting the wing... There then ensued a brief but fierce struggle, after which they retreated and we were able to establish our defensive line and take control of the main roof and effectively take control of D wing... the uprising was now in full swing!' (FRFI 98 December 1990/January 1991)

Fifty four protesters stayed on the roof of D wing for three days. They held up banners, gave clenched fist salutes to the media and supporters assembled below and shouted down demands for an inquiry into and improvements to conditions at Risley, and for no reprisals when they came down.

refurbishment. Together they resulted in enormous changes throughout the prison system.

In other ways it was very different from Strangeways: far tighter, far more studied, perhaps easier for the state to contain physically but harder for it to deal with politically. The new law of Prison Mutiny, intro-

of changes. It improved physical prison conditions and for a few years concentrated on bringing in positive measures, such as an end to slopping-out, more visits, less censorship, greater access to telephones. All of these were an unequivocal victory for everyone who had protested at Risley, Strangeways and elsewhere. But the victory was short-lived and many of the improvements were soon tied into the new 'Incentives and Earned Privileges' scheme, which was designed to divide the prison population against one another and render the solidarity of Risley so much harder to create.

## Still grisly

After the uprising, Risley was rebuilt and the men's remand centre converted to take category C prisoners serving medium length sentences. Conditions in the refurbished blocks were much improved and even staff attitudes became less aggressive. However, by 1993 the increasing remand population in the northwest was once again being warehoused at Risley. Unconvicted prisoners were allocated to the 'TAC' (temporary allocation centre), which was set up in the old, condemned, unrefurbished wings of the prison.

And throughout all the twists and turns in the men's prison, the 'women's side' of Risley remained unrelentingly dire: overcrowded, uncaring, insanitary. When the new Chief Inspector visited in 1996, women told him that the previous weekend they had been locked up the whole time, except for meals; there had been no access to the phone; there were no bathing facilities at reception and nits and fleas were being spread; staff treated the

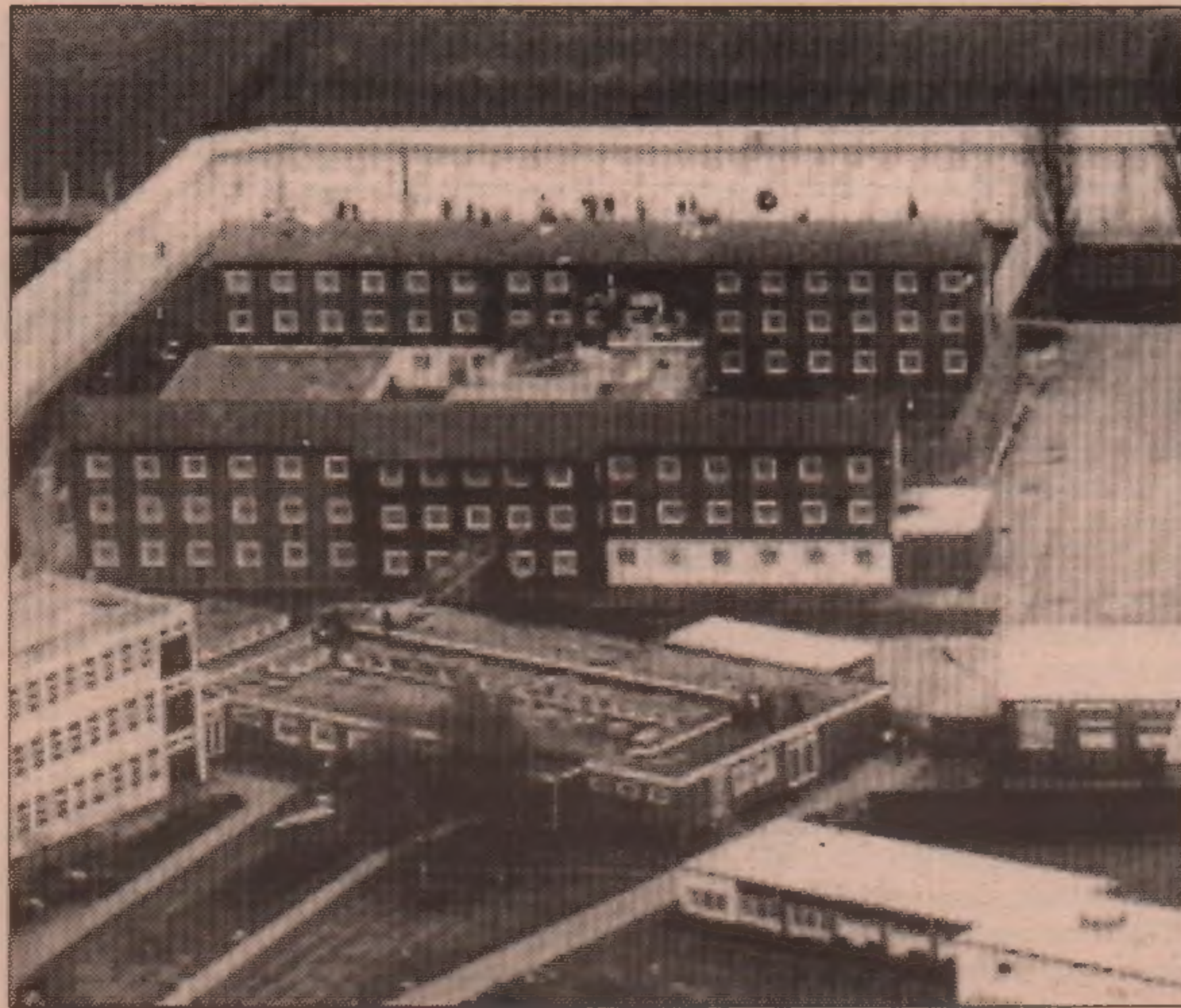
women like children and assumed all prisoners were drug-takers but there was no assistance for those who were; male officers were looking into women's cells; food was disgusting; prisoners were being arbitrarily transferred across the country; visitors had to wait long periods of time to get in.

## The spirit of Risley

The statement of the Risley 54, written by Wadi Williams for FRFI, was stolen from him prior to the trial by an employee of the education department at Hull prison, who handed it to the police. The prosecution produced it in court as evidence that the defendants were an organised revolutionary conspiracy. This backfired and the article only served to strengthen the prisoners' case that they were acting in self-defence against a barbaric system.

Today, the prison population is at its highest ever but the level of resistance is low. The state has learned many lessons from Risley and Strangeways and its divide-and-rule tactics are keeping the lid on the system – for now. But the sheer numbers being herded into prison will eventually ensure the rebirth of the fightback. The state's greatest fear is something which the Risley protesters celebrated: 'the awesome creative strength... released in people whom society had for so long dismissed as irrelevant'. Wadi's stolen article ends: 'Finally, the Risley Uprising also demonstrated that the human spirit remains UNBROKEN! UNBOWED! and UNTWISTED! SALUD!'

<sup>1</sup> Minimum Use of Force Tactical Intervention – Prison Officers' equivalent of riot police – later replaced by 'Control and Restraint teams'



Risley, May 1989

The level of political consciousness was high. The protesters emphasised their solidarity with one another and their refusal to be divided along racial lines, while prison officers taunted the white prisoners, shouting 'Throw the niggers off the roof' and 'How can you be led by niggers?' They made decisions by means of democratic mass assemblies and finally surrendered together in unity, having negotiated for solicitors to be present and photographs to be taken of them, in case they were beaten up later.

## The trial

A year later, 21 men stood trial, charged with criminal damage and riot, a Public Order Act charge used for the first time in a prison context. They faced up to ten years imprisonment on each count but withstood pressure to plead guilty in return for lesser sentences. Instead, they presented a case that conditions at Risley were so bad that their detention there amounted to false imprisonment, and that they were therefore entitled to use 'reasonable force' to mount their protest.

The judge was totally against the prisoners and directed the jury to ignore such arguments. The jury, however, was horrified by what it heard and acquitted all of them.

## The state learns some lessons

The verdict was a public humiliation for the government, and one it would take major steps to avoid in future. Following the massive revolt which spread from Strangeways prison through the entire system the following April, criminal charges were deliberately phrased so as to render a political defence virtually impossible.

Risley was in many senses a precursor to Strangeways. Both protests exposed appalling physical conditions and the brutality of prison officers. Both destroyed the myth that only long-term prisoners would protest. Both wrecked large sections of the prisons, forcing closure and

duced in 1991 and most recently used against Full Sutton prisoners, was as much a response to the deliberate political protest at Risley, as to the largely spontaneous uprising at Strangeways.

Following the protests of 1989-90, the government introduced a number

# Inside News

## Full Sutton – victory for prisoners in mutiny trial

As we go to press, the jury has just returned its verdicts in the second mutiny trial arising out of a protest by prisoners on two wings of Full Sutton prison in January 1997. Seven out of nine were acquitted after a trial with a viciously prejudiced judge, in which prison officers lied through their teeth.

Mark Gillan was earlier acquitted after not one single prosecution witness mentioned him in their evidence. Mark, a veteran of the 1989 Risley uprising (see main article), wrote to FRFI that those prisoners eventually tried out of the 180 present on the day and the 30 originally named by the police as 'suspects' were 'picked out of a screw's hat'. At the same time, a few old scores were being settled against prisoners who had been present at previous disturbances, or had escaped or otherwise angered the authorities.

The two men found guilty are due to be sentenced, together with the three from the first trial. We hope to have a fuller account in the next issue of FRFI and invite prisoners to submit any relevant material.

## CCRC

The Criminal Cases Review Commission has now been in operation for two years. In that time it has had 2,000 cases referred to it. Of these, 613 have been reviewed, with a few referred back to the Court of Appeal, resulting

in release, and some (such as Winston Silcott's) rejected. However, most innocent prisoners waiting on the CCRC are being subjected to the same agonising wait as characterised the old infamous Home Office C3 department. There are 490 cases 'under review' and 1,020 awaiting investigation. Gary Mills and Tony Poole, whose case was one of the first to be referred to the CCRC, have been told that they are 101st in the queue. John Kamara, who has been in prison since 1981 and whose case was the subject of a recent *Trial and Error* programme, is still waiting for the Commission to make a decision. In the blatant frame-up case of the M25 Three, the European Commission for Human Rights has beaten the CCRC in announcing that the men did not have a fair trial and should be granted a fresh appeal.

## Woodhill

The attempt by Rifat Mehmet and Sean O'Connor to judicially review the selection process for the Woodhill Closed Supervision Centre has failed (see letter from John Bowden in last FRFI). The judge accepted the Prison Service's case that allocation to a CSC was not a punishment and would not adversely affect the possibility of parole. In fact, in some senses it was a step forward, a chance for the selected prisoner to overcome his 'subversive' tendencies and move on to better things.

This rubbish may wash with High Court judges but it is not going to convince prisoners that Woodhill is anything other than a punishment unit, employing crude behaviour modification techniques. Resistance to the regime at Woodhill is far from over.

## US prisons

In 1998 the US prison population reached 1,802,500. This represents an incarceration rate of 668 per 100,000 citizens, twice the rate of 1985. (By comparison, England and



Wales has one of the highest rates in Europe – 120.) The total is expected to reach two million in the next two years. Much of the increase is due to 'three strikes' minimum sentencing legislation, recently adopted in Britain, and so-called 'honesty in sentencing', which reduces the possibility of parole. The prison population is predominantly male, disproportionately black and so large that it distorts US unemployment figures.

## Racist screw sacked from Belmarsh

Belmarsh prison, south London, has a large black prisoner population and is notorious for the racism of many of its staff. This was recently confirmed when Barry Lugg, a Belmarsh screw, was sacked following his conviction and gaoling for a frenzied racist attack on a black traffic warden who gave him a ticket. Lugg boasted to his victim: 'I'll treat you like I treat my prisoners'. (Info from *State-watch*)



The Revolutionary Communist Group was recently invited to speak at the annual festival of the Sosyalist İktidar Partisi in Turkey. Bob Derbyshire and Nigel Cook report:

'It is a political and cultural event attended by people from all over Turkey - there were over 4,000 on 28 February. The crowd was very mixed, with young students rubbing shoulders with veterans of Turkey's revolutionary movement and working class families with their children. Huddled in a corner by the side of the large stage was a small group of Turkish police who spent the whole evening writing notes about every speech and song. Outside, lines of police attempted, unsuccessfully, to intimidate the people flocking into the arena.

'The event lasted for about five hours with speeches and music. Revolutionary Kurdish and Turkish music mixed with music from the Alawi community and from one of Turkey's top rock bands who support the SIP. The climax of the whole event was when the SIP's own band lifted the roof of the arena with their revolutionary songs. The atmosphere was electric as hundreds of people, young and old, snaked around holding hands and dancing.

'As well as attending the festival, we visited the picket line of workers sacked for organising a union at Swiss-



The Festival arena

## Events

### NORTHWEST

FRFI Supporters' Group

**Preston:** Wednesday 5 May 7.30pm, Harrington Building, University of Central Lancashire.

**Manchester:** Wednesday 12 May 7.30pm, The Vine (downstairs), Kennedy Street.

### MIDLANDS

Lincoln Rock around the Blockade:

**Monday 19 April:** Cuba's foreign policy and the fight against imperialism

**Monday 10 May:** Poverty and inequality: Cuba's solution

For further details ring 01400 230 151

### LONDON

All meetings are at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square (nearest tube: Holborn)

Readers & Supporters' Group

**Monday 19 April 7.30pm**

Trade unions - friends or foes?

**Monday 17 May:** subject to be decided.

Public Meeting

**7.30pm Wednesday 5 May**

**Serbia: the shape of wars to come**

For further details tel: 0171 837 1688

Card in Istanbul, which produces plastic credit cards. The workers had attempted to form a union to fight for health and safety standards, because of the use of chemicals, and against the bullying attitude of management. Three workers were sacked in December 1998 for organising a union and 50 others came out with them. The picket line has now been going for more than 80 days. We discussed with them the lessons of

the Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign we were involved with in Britain and the reactionary role of British trade unions, and compared our experiences with those of Turkish workers. The strikers applauded our condemnation of Abdullah Ocalan's recent arrest and our support for Kurdish self-determination. The comrades also gave an extended interview to the SIP publication *Sol* in which they explained the political situation in Britain with the Labour government, condemning its arms sales to the Turkish state, and its support for Britain's imperialist interests in the Middle East.

■ The recent months have been active ones for FRFI supporters. In **Lincoln**, we have taken a lead in a campaign against local council cuts. In alliance with other political activists, we have produced a broadsheet, *The Paper*, and distributed it around working class estates and on stalls in the town centre. There has been plenty of support, together with some dismissive comments from the local Labour Party. Although the local council is Tory, we have pointed to the role of the Labour government in cutting public spending. Under the slogans No Council Cuts, No Council Tax Rises, Make the Rich Pay, we have had a lot of local interest and support. We are shortly holding a public meeting at which we shall discuss what further action we will take.

In **Scotland**, comrades mobilised support for a demonstration and picket of the Scottish Labour Party Conference over council cuts on 6 March. 2,000 people turned out - tenant organisations protesting against privatisation of all council house stock, workers in Direct Labour organisations opposing closures and staffing cuts. There were

no banners from the Socialist Workers' Party, and only one from the Scottish Socialist Party, not surprising given the anti-Labour character of the demonstration. Earlier, in February, when Unison shop stewards had discussed the event at a specially-convened meeting, it had taken all the effort of the officials on the platform to turn down proposals that the action take the form of a day of action on 5 March, and a lobby of Blair when he attended the conference. Up and down the country, the official union movement and its admirers on the left are uniting to stifle even the most basic anti-Labour activity.

In **Manchester**, comrades and supporters attended the National Critical



The streets of Istanbul

## FIGHTING CAPITALIST LIES...

Lawyers' conference, where they introduced sessions on globalisation, Kurdistan and Cuba. The response of many there was very supportive. The repressive and totalitarian character of Labour policies was very much to the fore in the debates at the conference, so that there were many people receptive to a communist political standpoint that could explain why Labour is what it is. This was reflected in literature sales, which included nine copies of *The New Warlords*, six copies of *Labour - A party fit for imperialism* and nearly 50 copies of FRFI.

Meanwhile there has been plenty of activity in **London**. Comrades supported the 27 February protest against the Immigration and Asylum Bill, joining with others in a noisy protest against the presence of Labour MP Diane Abbott on the platform. In their desperation to appear 'respectable', the

rally organisers had invited someone who had actually voted for the Bill! A Lib Dem MP said that it was 'sad' that New Labour 'forced' people to vote against their consciences. But a Labour MP has no conscience - all he or she is concerned about is what will best advance his or her career. Comrades also joined protests outside the Greek embassy protesting the kidnapping of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan and went on the massive protest march involving both Kurdish and Turkish communities.

With Labour imperialism on the rampage, now is the time to start to build a movement which breaks completely with the rotten traditions of the British official movement, and which does not seek compromise in the cause of 'respectability', but which champions the interests of the working class and oppressed. **Join us!**

# ROCK ON WITH ROCK AROUND THE BLOCKADE



Rock around the Blockade has been generating a lot of support for Cuban socialism since our third brigade returned from Cuba.

The reportback meeting in **London** was well-attended, with four speakers from the brigade and a lively discussion about the problems that have emerged during the Special Period and the importance of RATB work to counter some of these. Our fortnightly campaign meetings have had an educational focus. We have shown the documentary, *Fidel* and marked International Women's Day with a discussion on women in Cuba and those in struggle internationally. A further meeting discussed Cuba and internationalism. University College London Cuba Vive society held a carnival night, already clocking money for RATB's next sound system in 2000. Jim, a brigadista, wrote a three-page article about his experiences in Cuba for the radical magazine *Red Pepper*.

In **Oxford**, a successful reportback meeting was held and a salsa night is planned for 22 April (phone the campaign for details). A brigadista, Katy, is hoping to get Millennium funding for a video project about the experiences of young people in Cuba and Britain.

The lively young **Bristol** cadre has held two street meetings in Broadmead

shopping centre amid the chaos of the January sales. Through these events we have met interested and interesting individuals including radical journalists and academics researching into the effect of imperialist sanctions and chemical weapons in Iraq. A joint meeting is planned for 28 April at the university. A brigade reportback meeting at the university in February, attracted over 60 people for a lively and fierce debate concerning the merits of liberal democratic freedoms compared with the freedom of human development offered by Cuba. The meeting was followed by a full-page feature about Cuba in the student newspaper, recording the memorable 40th anniversary celebrations in Sancti Spiritus. The most active participants in Bristol have held discussions around FRFI. Several members attended a Socialist Workers Party meeting supposedly about Che Guevara, but generally an attack on Cuba. It is depressing to think that, without Cuba Vive's informed contribution, those attending the meeting would have left the meeting with a false and reactionary impression of both Cuban socialism and the contribution of Che Guevara. Bristol comrades have also organised a club night to run fortnightly, aiming to 'take

the private profit out of the party and put consciousness into clubbing'. The proceeds of the event will go to the RATB fund for the next brigade. A fantastic flyer, depicting Cuban revolutionaries has been produced and is circulating Bristol. The first two nights have been hugely successful. They have even included a group of Cuban-influenced drummers who have recently returned from learning the rhythms on the island.

A student from Rock around the Blockade at the **University of Lancashire** in **Preston** returned from our brigade in high spirits, enthusing his comrades in the student society. The reportback meeting in February had a good turnout and excellent discussion.



Newcomers to the society showed lots of enthusiasm for follow-up activities around the northwest. As George, the latest supporter said, 'I want to keep this candle burning.' RATB stalls are held every Wednesday in the student union foyer. Hundreds of people have signed the petition against the illegal US blockade and our Boycott Bacardi petition is also generating a lot of interest. Meetings are held in Preston every month: contact the campaign for details.

A brigade reportback meeting was

held in a **Lincoln** school at lunchtime attracting sixth form students and staff. In the evening a public meeting attracted over 40 people. The discussion revealed the strong ideological differences between communists from Rock around the Blockade and the sympathetic attitude of liberal tourists who had recently returned from a charity cycle ride around Cuba. Many there signed up with Rock around the Blockade. Lincoln holds fortnightly meetings emphasising the link between support for Cuba and the struggle against capitalism. Issues discussed have included 'Cuba's response to the global crisis and third world poverty' and 'Environmental destruction, agribusiness and Cuba's green alternative.'

### Building for the future

Rock around the Blockade is starting to build for our fourth brigade to Cuba, in the Spring of 2000, when we will be going to Guantanamo, the cradle of Cuba's revolution. We need to raise funds for a mobile disco for the UJC, to help take music to the most remote areas of this rural region. We will also be collecting material aid for a UJC project to provide a toy library in every town for the

children of Cuba and continuing with our Boycott Bacardi campaign. Join us!

Susan Rose

### Events

#### LONDON

Campaign meetings are held every other Monday, 8pm, at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London (Holborn tube).

**12 April:** Remember the Bay of Pigs

**26 April:** Building the next RATB brigade to Cuba

**10 May:** Workers' rights in Cuba

**24 May:** Organic agriculture in Cuba

A public meeting on The Banana War will be held in

May. Ring the campaign on 0171 837 1688 for further details.

#### LINCOLN

**Monday 19 April:** Cuba's foreign policy and the fight against imperialism

**Monday 10 May:** Poverty and inequality: Cuba's solution

For further details ring 01400 230 151

### CSC AGM: the fine art of doing nothing

Supporters of Rock around the Blockade attended this year's AGM of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign to give support to motions calling for a national demonstration and to boycott Bacardi. The political priorities of the CSC leadership were clear. Labour MP Angela Smith had half an hour; the representative of the Cuban Women's Federation had 15 minutes tucked into the afternoon session. *Cuba Si* editor Steven Wilkinson opposed the call for a demonstration arguing that it would be an 'unnecessary waste of CSC resources'. Drawing on events in Kosovo, he said 'we should concentrate on building the CSC so that we will be in a better position to respond should something like this happen in Cuba.' Despite this analogy, an emergency motion condemning the bombing of Yugoslavia was ruled out of order on constitutional grounds. Better to do nothing then; even the motion against Bacardi mysteriously vanished after RATB supporters argued for a stepping up of the Boycott Bacardi campaign.

Following FRFI's refutation of the lies spread against Nigel Cook, suggesting that Nigel had been kicked out of Cuba for being a spy, we have now been promised a statement in *Cuba Si* stating that the allegations are untrue.

Meanwhile, CSC members should wonder about the value for money that they are getting from the CSC. £56,000 was spent on salaries for two full-time and one part-time worker.



## CHOOSE THE RCG

If you believe that the treachery of the opportunist British labour and trade union movement must be challenged, then there is no alternative - **Join the RCG!**

I would like to join/receive more information about the RCG ☐

I would like to join an FRFI Readers & Supporters Group ☐

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### DEMONSTRATIONS AND EVENTS

**MARCH AGAINST LOW PAY**  
Saturday 10 April Assemble 12 noon  
Gateshead for march to Newcastle.  
For transport details contact Unison  
on 0171 388 2366

**ANTI-WAR DEMONSTRATION**  
Saturday 17 April  
Assemble 1pm Speaker's Corner, Hyde  
Park, London for march to Trafalgar  
Square and rally 3pm  
Initially called to stop the bombings and  
lift sanctions against Iraq, this demon-  
stration is also to oppose  
imperialist war in the Balkans.

**LONDON SOCIALIST FILM CO-OP**  
'Cinema of Protest'  
Saturday 15 May 1999  
A programme of screenings of political  
films and discussion on future prospects  
for oppositional film-making.  
Participants will include: Gustav Lamche  
(Schlacke) from Cinema Action, showing  
*Upper Clyde Shipbuilders*, Norman Thomas  
and Christine Tongue from TV Choice  
showing *What's going on in Cuba?*, Jason  
Torrance from Undercurrents showing  
*News at Ten sucks*, *Global News* and  
*Breaking news* and Ken Fero from Migrant  
Media showing excerpts from *Dead men*  
talking about murders by the police  
For details contact the London Socialist  
Film Co-op on 0171 278 5764

## LETTERS

write to FRFI BCM Box 5909 London WC1N 3XX e-mail: rcgfrfi@easynet.co.uk

### Letter from the USA

**R**evolutionary greetings from inside the belly of the beast! I really liked the last issue of FRFI and thought your article on US prisons was absolutely stellar! Very thorough coverage and very well-written. I also liked the article on Rosa Luxemburg and the one about John Maclean. Was he part of the Socialist Party which is now known as SPGB? I've been reading a book about an American firebrand of the same period, Eugene Victor Debs. A very interesting fellow. He orchestrated a massive Pullman national strike and ran for President of the US two or three times, as a Socialist Party candidate. He was jailed for seditious speech against the First World War and ran for President from his prison cell once again. He was a master orator and would go across country on a train called the Red Special, decked out with flags, and would stop at every town and give a speech about socialism and people really loved him.

Anyway, thank you for sending me the FRFIs. They are greatly appreciated.

KEVIN GLOVER  
Huntsville Unit, PO Box 32, Huntsville,  
Texas 77342-0099, USA

### Racism in British gaols

**I**n 1995 when I was at Strangeways prison, I was put on the Basic regime (the lowest privilege level) and taken to I wing. I had previously heard that prison officers beat you up on arrival there.

On entering I wing, I was taken into a cell by two officers who told me they were going to give me a strip search. During the search, while I was almost naked, four or five prison officers wearing helmets with the visors down rushed into the cell and started to attack me. After giving me a kicking they started to threaten me and call me a black bastard. They said I was very lucky to have been found not guilty of the Strangeways riot in 1990 and now that I was back in prison I was going to be in for a hard time and would be lucky if I got out alive.

I spent about two months on I wing and during that time was subjected to nonstop abuse by prison officers. I was not beaten up again, but most days I could hear them going into other prisoners' cells and beating them up.

In 1998 at HMP Wymott I was subjected to racial abuse from a prison officer and when I made a complaint against him I was punished by being recategorised from category C to B and sent back to HMP

Garth. I then wrote to *Inside Time* about Wymott and in my letter said that the racial equality unit at Garth was good but following the publication of that letter I have been harassed by officers at Garth and am currently seeking legal advice about a number of complaints.

I am now coming to the end of my sentence and, although the authorities have violently and racially victimised me throughout my sentence, I can say that this has only made me a stronger person. Unfortunately there are a lot of other prisoners who are still being beaten up and racially abused daily in prison. Some of them, like me, are strong enough to get through it, but others take their own lives as a result.

I would advise any prisoner who has experienced harassment or beatings in the prison system to write to a solicitor who deals with prison matters. You will be able to seal your letters yourself so that the prison officers cannot read them by writing Rule 37a on the outside of the envelope. Remember that the only way to stamp out racism is to make complaints.

ANDREW NELSON  
HMP Garth, Ulles Walton Lane,  
Leyland, Preston PE5 3NE

### Support Kenny Carter

**I**n early March prisoner activist Kenny Carter was placed in solidarity confinement at Full Sutton in the so-called interests of 'Good Order and Discipline', which basically means that although he had committed no offence against prison discipline, the governor and his staff decided that his continued presence on 'normal location' was in some way 'subversive' and objectionable. The truth is that the administration at Full Sutton had never been happy with having to accept Kenny in the gaol because of his past history as a prison organiser and so decided to segregate him at the earliest opportunity and for no real reason whatsoever.

Kenny had previously spent years on the 'ghost-train', being moved constantly around segregation units and control units before the prison authorities moved him to Full Sutton in late 1998. The governor there obviously objected to having Kenny in his prison and so segregated him immediately upon his arrival. After two or three months, and probably as a result of pressure from Prison Service headquarters, the governor finally relented and allowed Kenny onto an ordinary wing, but it was obvious that he was a target for prison staff, who resented being forced to allow him even a minimum of physical freedom.

After just four months on 'normal location', Kenny was jumped in his cell by a goon squad and placed back into segregation, where he remains. The fact is that Kenny is being victimised because of his reputation as a prisoner activist and defender of prisoners' rights, and it is therefore important that he is supported by everyone who shares his vision of a society free from brutal prison systems and dehumanised prisoners.

Write letters of support to Kenny Carter (AD3434, HMP Full Sutton, Moor Lane, York YO4 1PS) and send letters of protest to the governor at the same address and to Prison Service Headquarters, Cleland House, Page Street, London SW1P 4LN.

JOHN BOWDEN  
HMP Full Sutton

### Rene Waller

3 April 1913 - 22 March 1999

Rene Waller died in hospital on the night of 21 March, just two weeks before her 86th birthday. Her life was one of political activity, a tireless struggle for socialism, through the wars and upheavals which have marked this century.

In 1931, at the age of 18, she joined the Labour Party to campaign against growing attacks on the working class. But once Labour lost the election that year, it virtually ceased any campaigning on the ground. She and other new young members formed a branch of the Labour League of Youth (Youth Section of the Labour Party) and threw themselves into the struggle against unemployment in Britain and for support for Republican Spain. Later, they responded eagerly to the call for unity against fascism. Under cover of rambles in the countryside, the branch organised to fight the Labour Party's attempts to control their activities; such rambles and other social events also gave them the opportunity to meet and discuss with members of the 'proscribed' Communist Party.

Despite instructions from the Labour Party to ignore the Blackshirts and they would disappear, Rene and her comrades joined attempts to stop Mosley's fascist marches. Rene remembers being lifted onto the shoulders of a

docker at the Battle of Cable Street in 1936 so she could see the running battles as the East End mobilised against the fascists and the police protecting them.

Rene joined the Communist Party in 1937 and, as an activist in Hornsey, was involved in setting up a borough-wide Aid Spain Committee. Within her branch, she fought those in the CP who wanted to concentrate all their resources on winning acceptability with the Labour Party. 'We, on the other hand, wanted a campaign in the local press and on the streets gathering support from youth groups, women's groups, church groups, liberals, just about everyone we could rope in.' She would later bring the lessons of those battles to City of London Anti-Apartheid Group in its arguments with the official Anti-Apartheid Movement about how best to build a real movement in Britain.

Increasingly depressed by the postwar manoeuvrings of the CP, its move towards revisionism and Euro-communism, Rene took refuge in campaigns against cuts in adult education and in anti-apartheid work, inspired by the example of David Kitson, on trial for his life in South Africa.

Rene had met Norma and David Kitson during the 1950s when she and David were in the same CP

branch. The Kitsons returned to South Africa and David was soon arrested for his leading role in Umkhonto we Sizwe. He was imprisoned for 20 years. When Norma, now in exile in London, set up the Free David Kitson campaign with David's union TASS (later MSF), Rene was amongst the first to get involved. Her support for David never wavered, even when, after his release in 1984, he was so treacherously abandoned by his union.

By that time, City of London Anti-Apartheid Group had been set up by the Kitson family and the Revolutionary Communist Group. Rene, now in her seventies, was membership secretary and was regularly to be seen on our pickets of the South African Embassy from 1983 onwards.

In 1991, Rene joined the Revolutionary Communist Group, seeing us as the only organisation in Britain who recognised the tremendous tragedy for the working class represented by the fall of the Soviet Union.

A stroke in 1994 made it more difficult for Rene to travel to meetings. Never one to give up political activities, she immersed herself in her local Lewisham pensioners' group, fighting for a decent pension, but always drawing the link between that struggle and the fight of the working class as a whole for justice. Until last winter, she could still be seen making her way to pensioners' meetings and street stalls in her electric wheelchair. She wrote many Pensioners' Notes

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As the 'New' Labour Party lives up to its history as imperialism's favourite party, we have two books on special offer to FRFI readers which will give you the communist analysis of the Labour Party, imperialism and war.  
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by Robert Clough

ISBN 0 905400 14 3

Published 1992 192pp

'For a view of the Labour Party outside its red rose and double-breasted suit image, this is a valuable work.'

John Pilger



**The New Warlords:  
from the Gulf War to the  
recolonisation of the  
Middle East**

Edited by Eddie Abrahams

ISBN 0 905400 17 8

Published 1994, 192pp



for this newspaper.

Rene was always courageous, committed and extremely modest. She said she wasn't afraid of dying because she wasn't that important - what mattered was the movement for justice and inequality that could only be achieved by socialism. The point of living was how you could contribute to the struggle for a better life for all. It was the struggle that gave you happiness. The best way we can remember Rene is to continue to fight for the things she believed in.

Rene's funeral will be held at 4pm on Tuesday 6 April at Lewisham Crematorium, Verdant Lane, Hither Green, London SE6 (284 bus)

## What we stand for

The Revolutionary Communist Group fights for a society which produces for people's needs, not profit - that is, a socialist society.

Capitalist society is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling capitalist class, for profit. Internationally, imperialism divides the world into oppressed and oppressor nations: the majority lives in poverty, while a tiny minority squanders unprecedented wealth. By restricting production worldwide to the narrow limits of profit-making, the basic needs of the majority of humanity cannot be fulfilled.

► In Britain today more than four million are unemployed with many people - women in particular - trapped in low wage, part-time jobs. 25% of the population - the majority women and children - lives in poverty, with lower wages, lower benefit and fewer social services. Meanwhile, money-grabbers in the newly-privatised industries (like the water authorities) and banks amass more profits and pay their directors inflated salaries. **The RCG supports the struggle of the working class to defend and improve its living standards.**

► Racist attacks are on the increase. The police do nothing to defend black people against attack, and instead blame black people for crime. At the same time, Britain's racist immigration laws are used to harass, detain and deport black people. **The RCG fights against racism and fascism in all its forms. We support the right of black people to organise and defend themselves against racist attack. We oppose all immigration laws.**

► While the working class bears the brunt of the crisis, new laws like the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act and anti-trade union legislation have been introduced to criminalise the right to protest. **The RCG opposes all anti-working class laws and fights to defend democratic rights - the right to organise and protest.**

► Britain is an imperialist country. Ireland is Britain's oldest colony and the nationalist working class of the Six Counties are subject to military occupation and brutal repression. **The RCG supports the struggle of the Irish people for self-determination and calls for the immediate withdrawal of British troops.**

► Internationally, oppressed nations are driven into poverty and debt by imperialism as multinationals extort superprofits from the labour of the poor. Throughout Asia, Africa, Latin America and eastern Europe the effects of the free market are obvious - low wages, appalling work conditions, poverty and starvation for the mass of the people; environmental degradation, corruption and repression in government. **The RCG supports the struggle of all oppressed people against imperialism.**

► The RCG supports socialist Cuba and condemns the illegal US blockade. **We fight actively in defence of the Cuban revolution.**

► In the drive for profits, the needs of human beings and the environment are secondary to the profits of multinational companies. **The RCG supports the struggle to defend the environment.**

► The Labour Party is a ruling class party which defends capitalism. In power it has never defended the interests of the working class. **The RCG fights for the independent interests of the whole working class. We do not support any of the pro-capitalist parties in elections.**

► The RCG fights against prejudice and bigotry, which are used by the ruling class to divide and weaken the working class. **We oppose all discrimination against black people, women, lesbians, gay men and people with disabilities.**

The defence of the working class and oppressed can only come from the working class organising democratically and independently in its own interests, in Britain and internationally. **The Revolutionary Communist Group stands for the rebirth of a socialist movement internationally to destroy capitalism and imperialism and replace them with a socialist society, organised to defend the interests of the working class and oppressed. Join us.**

**Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!**  
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**FIGHT  
RACISM**

**FIGHT IMPERIALISM**

## THE STEPHEN LAWRENCE INQUIRY

# British police are racist police

**F**or 69 days, 88 witnesses gave evidence, including the Lawrence family themselves, police officers and representatives of anti-racist campaigns around Britain; statements and documents submitted ran to over 100,000 pages. The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry represented the first major investigation into policing since the Scarman Inquiry into the Brixton uprisings of 1981. However, in direct contrast to Scarman, who specifically rejected any notion of 'institutional racism' in the Metropolitan police and blamed, instead, 'a few rotten apples', Sir Ian Macpherson, who led the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, states that the police, and especially the Met, are permeated by a 'pernicious and institutionalised racism'. Further, that this pervasive, often 'unwitting' or 'covert' racism not only played a significant role in the failure of any police investigation to bring Stephen's murderers to justice, but has led also to a disastrous breakdown in trust between the police and the black community throughout Britain which can only be rebuilt by a sweeping overhaul of police practice and policy.

There are significant gaps in the Inquiry – in particular its inadequate investigation into allegations of police corruption centred around Clifford Norris, the father of David Norris, one of the five murder suspects. Clifford Norris, currently in prison, was never called as a witness. Nor were some of the key informants as to the identity of the murderers. The fiasco over the publication of names and addresses of other witnesses, who now fear for their safety, was unforgivable. Nevertheless, the Stephen Lawrence Report is an explosive indictment of police incompetence and racist negligence. The question is how it will be used, and by whom, to challenge racism in Britain.

### Increasing trust in the police?

Macpherson makes 70 recommendations, based on the report's findings. Some arise directly from the specifics of the case. One, that those acquitted of a crime be tried again where new evidence becomes available – so-called 'double jeopardy' – is clearly a kneejerk reaction to the Inquiry's sense of frustration that Stephen's killers cannot be tried again in a court of law. It has, quite rightly, been widely criticised as fundamentally undemocratic. In practice, as with all other legislation ostensibly directed against fascists, the main victims of such a law would inevitably be progressive forces.

However, the main thrust of Macpherson's recommendations relate to the Inquiry's expressed purpose to 'increase trust and confidence in policing amongst minority ethnic communities.' These include making the Race Relations Act applicable to the police force, greater 'cultural awareness' training, greater accountability and monitoring, recruiting more black people to the police and so on. The majority have been accepted by the government and will become part of a new Race Relations Act in the next session of parliament. Some, such as making the Police Complaints Authority accountable to an independent body, facilitating the reporting and monitoring of racist incidents and applying OFSTED standards of regular inspection, pub-

**'The conclusions to be drawn from the evidence in connection with the investigation of Stephen Lawrence's racist murder are clear. There is no doubt that... the investigation was marred by a combination of professional incompetence, institutional racism and a failure of leadership by senior officers.'**

*Report from Stephen Lawrence Inquiry*

**The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry was set up to investigate why the Metropolitan police failed to bring to justice the killers of a black teenager murdered at an Eltham bus stop in 1993. Its findings, published in February, reveal publicly and irrefutably as never before the entrenched racism of the British police – something black people have been familiar with for all too long. CAT WIENER reports.**



Mr and Mrs Lawrence with the Inquiry report

lic reporting and informed independent advice to the police, are to be welcomed. The report also stresses the need for an anti-racist component in the National Curriculum in schools, better monitoring and reporting of racist incidents in schools, adequate funding to be restored to youth centres and projects, and the examination of institutional racism within the criminal justice system, housing and social services. These are all positive recommendations.

### Racist backlash

However, in reality, real change is likely to be limited. A racist backlash is emerging. We have already seen Metropolitan Commissioner Paul Condon, with the full support of Home Secretary Jack Straw, remain in charge of his racist force. On the ground, the police are deeply hostile to the findings of the Inquiry. In this they have the backing of Middle England, as letters to the right-wing press testify: 'Lawrence report offensive to ordinary [ie white] British people' screams *The Telegraph*. Calls for the the killing of white police officer PC Blakelock during

the Broadwater Farm uprising of 1985 to be reinvestigated as a 'racist murder' have been heeded – as if at the time the black community had not already been swamped by police, with mass arrests and intimidation resulting in the frame-up of three men, two of them black. The Commission for Racial Equality has seen its postbag swell with racist hate mail since the report was published. Small wonder, then, that one important recommendation, that police officers should be able to face disciplinary charges for up to five years after retirement, has been referred to a legal commission chaired by the Home Secretary and is unlikely ever to see the light of day. As in the case of Stephen Lawrence, senior police officers who preside over racist negligence and incompetence will still be able to escape any sanction.

And while some cases of unsolved racist murders such as those of Michael Menson and Ricky Reel – whose initial investigations were marred by the same racist police contempt – are being investigated anew, the reality is that the police will go on treating the majority of black people, particularly black working class peo-



ple, in the same old way. In January, only weeks before the Lawrence Report was published, Roger Sylvester, a young black man, died in police custody after being 'restrained'; not one of the eight officers involved has been suspended. 145 black people have died in police or prison custody since 1969. Those who defend themselves against racist attacks are all too likely to find themselves under arrest, like Satpal Ram, now in his thirteenth year of detention, while the perpetrators go free. Black people are 7.5 times more likely to be stopped and searched, and four times more likely to be arrested, than white people; in the Metropolitan police areas, black people form one quarter of all those stopped and searched by police. Yet the Lawrence report, while recognising racial discrimination in the practice, recommends that stop-and-search laws should remain, except that police should provide on request a record of the reason for the search.

### Racist Britain

The problem is that the Lawrence Inquiry, however well-meaning, cannot tackle police racism because it cannot identify the root cause – the British state. The British state is an imperialist state, maintaining its control over oppressed nations by political, economic and military means. It strangles such nations through super-exploitation, unequal terms of trade and the imposition of unpayable debts, forcing the majority to live in poverty – or migrate looking for work abroad. In Britain, immigration was encouraged in the 1950s to provide a cheap labour force to service the burgeoning welfare state and public transport system. As unemployment started to climb, ever-tighter immigration laws were imposed (see p7). Just as racism was used to justify Britain's oppression of poorer nations, so racism is used to divide the working class in Britain between black and white, and at the same time to control and repress those who rebel against the poverty and degradation into which they are forced. The British police force is the frontline of the state's armoury of repression. It cannot be anything but racist. Macpherson's calls for a rebuilding of trust, of policing by consent, is the voice of the lost liberal, crying in the wilderness. Far more accurate is the

statement by Stephen Lawrence's mother, Doreen, that no black person should ever trust the police force nor join it.

For despite the acres of newsprint holding Stephen Lawrence up as an icon for cultural change in Britain, the real purpose of the government in setting up the inquiry – as with most of its race relations exercises – was to preserve the status quo. The courage and determination of the Lawrence family in ensuring their demands for justice were heard struck a chord with a New Labour Party with a significant black middle class constituency to appease. Stephen Lawrence – an able and aspiring student with articulate, hard-working parents – was transformed into the respectable face of anti-racism by an opportunist and cynical government and media. So, on the one hand, with sickening hypocrisy, Jack Straw and his lapdog press voice their support for the Lawrences and for the Inquiry's findings. Meanwhile, their rabid, racist propaganda against asylum seekers and refugees provides the very climate for the kind of attacks which killed Stephen Lawrence.

### A new movement

If the findings of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry are to have any impact on the majority of black working class people, it can only be as a springboard for a new anti-racist movement. Such a movement will oppose racist immigration laws as the bedrock of a racist state. It will not tolerate the constant harassment and criminalisation through stop-and-search and other laws of its youth. It will defend the right to self-defence against racist attacks – as Richard Adams, father of 15-year-old Rolan Adams who was murdered by racists in 1991, told his surviving son: 'I would rather visit you in prison than in the morgue.' The daily experience of young working class people, black and white, teaches them to have no confidence in the police. Sir John Woodcock, formerly of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Police, put it succinctly in 1992: 'Despite all the later mythology of Dixon [of Dock Green], the police never really were the police of the whole people but a mechanism set up to protect the affluent from what the Victorians described as the dangerous classes.' Like Scarman before him, Macpherson fears the social consequences of an ever more polarised society. Black youth are increasingly disenfranchised through exclusion from school, lack of qualifications, unemployment and semi-employment. The choice is to be forced into lives of despair and poverty or to organise to defend basic rights. Such a defence cannot but demand taking on the police, the organised frontline of the racist British state. ■

\* For a fuller account of police handling of the investigation into the Lawrence murder, see FRFI 144, August/September 1998.